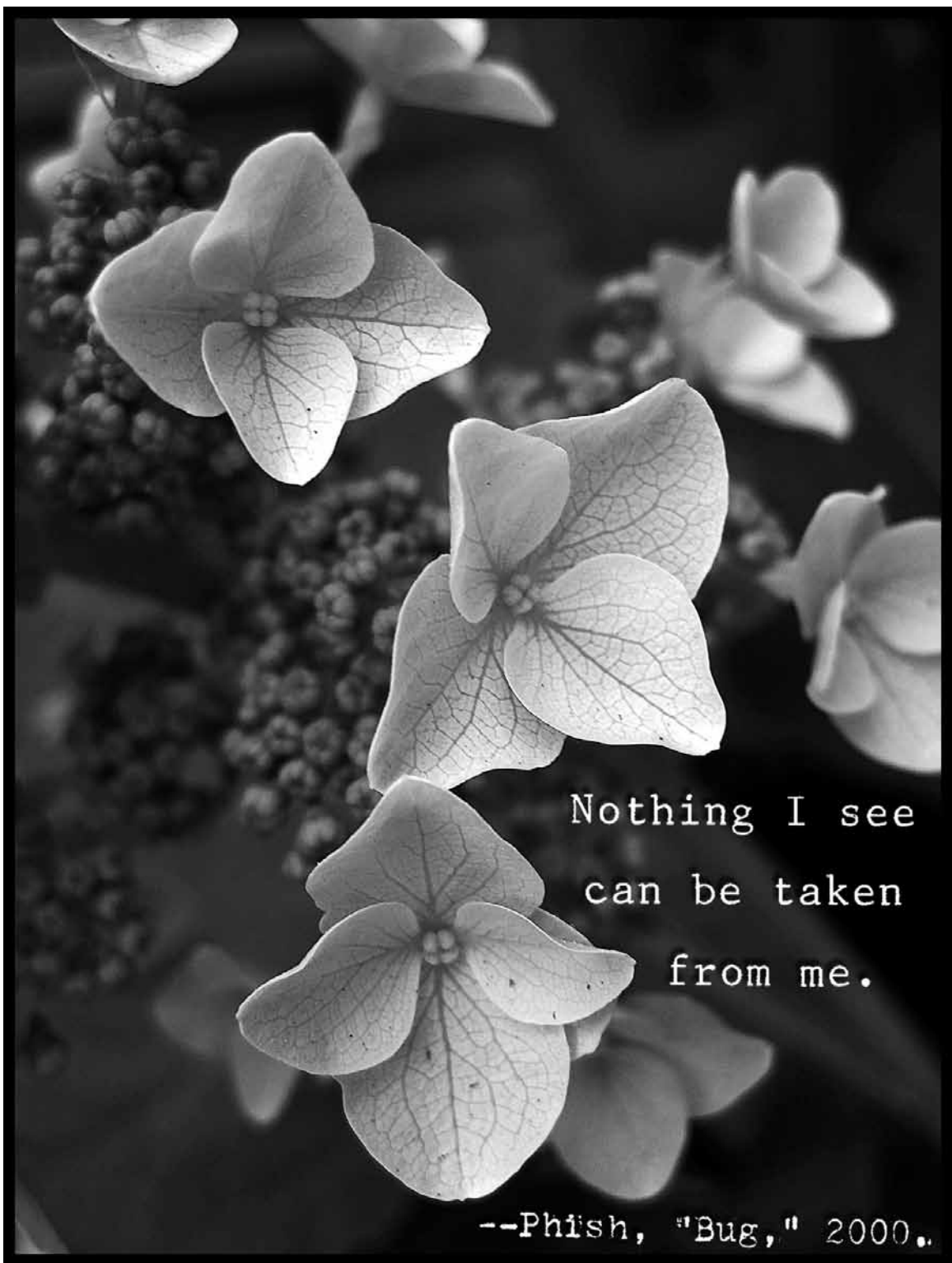


The Cenacle



NUMBER 108 | JUNE 2019



Nothing I see
can be taken
from me.

--Phish, "Bug," 2000.

July 10, 2019
5:58 p.m.
Eastern Doughnut shop -
my table
Framingham,
Mass.

I've been trying to locate the center point of how much I loathe your presidency. Before you lied your way into the White House, promising the moon, stars, & eternal life itself to millions of people beaten down enough by life to have known better but the racist sexist catcalls in your speeches, your slick salesman's way of massaging their egos to feel part of a special clan, your preacherly way of promising reward for those who followed you, & punishment for all the rest, your Archie Bunker-like charisma of prejudice & you, I, Duce like self-aggrandizement - before all this, you were just one, more crooked businessman in a nation of them; add to that your time on a TV show, I'd put well below waking paint thin



-14-
on my list. You were a loud, gaudy
nothing to me. A silver spoon. A piece
of shit.

You won't the presidency like you've
won in the business world: bullying,
cheating, blaming others, lying & lying
& lying. That's common in business. In
politics too, but it tends to be of a
different kind.

Most politicians understand that
governance is a we game, not an
I game. Crooked or not, they tend
to legislate on behalf of at least
some part of the population. Most
of them understand the idea of service
to others. It interests them, even
obsesses some. The population divides
along ideas of who politicians should
serve most, & how.

Some politicians favor the interests
of the rich, others those of the
poor & minorities. These are not
solvable differences; at best, com-
promises are struck & everyone gets



-15-

at least a piece.

None of this describes you. You are
a party of one, a party of me,
your allies shift according to
their usefulness to you.

You lied to millions during your 2016
campaign, promising good healthcare
& jobs & repaired infrastructure. Once
in office, & the deeper veins of your
criminal path were exposed, you lied
as one after the next, your once-
close friends & allies were shackled
off to jail, for helping you.

Will your day of reckoning come?
I hope so, when you are defeated
in November of 2020. Beyond that,
we all weaken & perish eventually.
I doubt you'll repent, all the crimes
you've committed, all the people
you've hurt. You'll pass blaming the
universe itself for not exempting
you from mortality, from not
being like so many others before
your party of one, party of me.

-16-

So much campaigning has already begun to defeat you, to get back to some semblance of "We the People." Nobody knows how deep a wound to the American psyche you've struck.

I would favor your impeachment & trial for removal from office. You are an unapprehended criminal. Maybe one day it will all catch up with you.

But it seems like most in this country want to vote you out just as you were allegedly voted in. It's like the way to end your reign of aged children & racist cold war & so much more is to show you the door by the traditional legal manner.

Push that door open & say, "You lost, Donald Trump. You're now a loser. We don't want you anymore. You're fired."

Here's to that joyous day coming from the distance of so many days until then.

~~7/16/2019~~ 7/16/2019 Zombie, Mass.

The Cenacle

NUMBER 108 | JUNE 2019

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

Assistant Editor: Cassandra Souland

FEEDBACK.....	1
FROM THE ELECTROLOUNGE FORUMS.....	5
POETRY by Tamara Miles & John Echem.....	9
POETRY by Sam Knot.....	13
VINES AND VIGNETTES [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Nathan D. Horowitz.....	17
POETRY by Tom Sheehan.....	25
MANY MUSICS [POETRY] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀].....	27
POETRY by Martina Newberry.....	45
SAME MOON SHINING [MEMOIR EXCERPTS] by Tamara Miles.....	47
POETRY by Colin James.....	53
NOTES FROM NEW ENGLAND [COMMENTARY] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀].....	57
POETRY by Judih Haggai.....	61
POETRY & ITS DEATH [CLASSIC PROSE] by Virginia Woolf.....	65
POETRY by Ace Boggess.....	75
BAGS END BOOK #13: THE GREAT PILLOW SUMMIT! [FICTION] by Algernon Beagle.....	81
POETRY by Gregory Kelly.....	95
THE CROCODILE KING OF BELIZE [PROSE] by Charlie Beyer.....	97

POETRY	
by Jimmy Heffernan.....	115
MY ADVENTURES WITH THE TRIP DOCTORS [ESSAY]	
by Michael Pollan.....	119
POETRY	
by Joe Ciccone.....	135
LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FIXTION]	
by Raymond Soulard, Jr. [🌀].....	137
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS.....	161

Front and back cover graphic artwork by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard. Original *Cenacle* logo by Barbara Brannon. Interior graphic artwork by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard, unless otherwise noted.

Accompanying disk to print version contains:

- *Cenacles* #47-108
- Burning Man Books #1-72
- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-18
- *RaiBooks* #1-8
- RS Mixes from “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”; &
- Jellicle Literary Guild Highlights Series

Disk contents downloadable at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/cenacle/supplementary_disk.zip.

The Cenacle is published quarterly (with occasional special issues) by Scriptor Press New England, 2442 NW Market Street, #363, Seattle, Washington, 98107. It is kin organ to ElectroLounge website (<http://www.scriptorpress.com>), RaiBooks, Burning Man Books, *Scriptor Press Sampler*, The Jellicle Literary Guild, & “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution w/Soulard,” broadcast online worldwide weekends on SpiritPlants Radio (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com>). All rights of works published herein belong exclusively to the creator of the work. Email comments to: editor@scriptorpress.com.

Thank you to Phish & Fenway Park for putting on a show that kept KD & I up til all hours smiling about!



SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2019

Feedback on Cenacle 107 | April 2019

From Ace Boggess:

Tom Sheehan's "A Recall for Seamus Heaney" is strikingly beautiful. As a whole, it is both introspective and universal, calling up a feel, a place, all with a sort of zip in the short lines that pulls the reader along. It's a journey of a poem, stopping to read the road signs and see the sights. It also summons Heaney from the dead. It has that feel, too. Just a wonderful poem. I adored everything about it.

From Greg Kelly:

Tom Sheehan's "A Recall for Seamus Heaney" reminds me that life is not without history. "On birch floors my hoes sound dull as wood pulses an ancient drummer marked time with / I have been other places before, before I got there / Out of which I walk toward myself." And his talk of the "metallic Atlantic," the "wind full of slam and salt and voice," makes me miss the coastal life.

The title and the closing of Martina Newberry's poem "Orphanage" is striking: "Orphan[age] . . . Come here. I'll hold you in this wilderness." The title and those two lines could be a poem unto itself. It's love and kindness, and fatherhood-motherhood-friendship, human to human to human. It is mystery and complexity, simple mundane everyday heart-beating-lungs-breathing action mixed with hope, hope that overrides despair. It is tragedy met and overcome. It is loneliness cuddled and never let go. It is the "I don't know who I am" taken over by the "Yeah, but you're with me and we're *together together together together*. I will be with you as you find yourself." It is me as a parent to my newborn child because all I want to do is love the little being so they will never be without. It is sheer humanity to embrace another. It is downright tear-jerking beautiful.

From Nathan D Horowitz:

In the beautifully musical poems "Exodus," "Tomcat's Sermon," and "Coyote: Trickster," Tamara Miles goes tribal priestess, storyteller, deep ecology prophetess, juxtaposing the pains of eco-destruction with the powers of nature. The great spirit, she reminds us, is *not* on the endangered list.

In "The Crocodile King of Belize," Charlie Beyer brings us back to a hellish paradise of stinking, invigorating tropical squalor, making me simultaneously nauseous and homesick for a place I've never been. I'm concerned for his characters JC and Rose; is there any way they could be warned about getting in over their heads in reptile-infested swamps? Also, what's up with those two missing Mayan kids?

In "That Town," Martina Newberry eloquently evokes and puts a stake in the heart of a zombie from her past. When I read it aloud in the car, my mom said, "I have a town like that."

From Martina Newberry:

Nathan D. Horowitz's "We Are Those Guys" struck me dumb. It's such a powerful piece and, once I began reading, I couldn't put it down; after I read it the first time, I went back and read it twice more. One passage stood out to me, rang a bell somewhere in my head and heart:

This is it, I think. Raw poetry. Inspired madness is how it began. The collective soul of humanity bubbling up through a human voice.

From Charlie Beyer:

Nathan D. Horowitz takes me back to the jungle once again, where every bush and bug become beasts of the other world. He takes me to a place of both wonder at the universe and disgust at the pathos of man. The dilemma of sinking into one's selfish visions versus babysitting some spoiled American who can't handle unreality. I am glad that Nathan can continue his trip by ditching fools in the banana field.

* * * * *

From Jimmy Heffernan:

I have been enchanted lately with Martina Newberry's poetry in publications outside of *The Cenacle*, so it is my pleasure to impart my vigorous assent to her lovely "Orphanage" within it. The language flows and floats, transcending itself, as we are transported to a world few of us have known. Her opening lines grab us and shake us, pulverizing us downward and upward simultaneously. It is a poem of imprisonment and loss, yet the emotion it evokes is not dark and severe, but rather of a sober levity and an almost redemptive acceptance. In its terminus, we are brought into the embrace of a humanity that is both relieving and hopeful, but not a cheap hope—one instead that is grounded in reality and in the constancy of a loving embrace that can touch and redeem any human, at any time. Martina is a very gifted poet.

* * * * *

From Judih Haggai:

I loved Nathan's fabulous ode to his father's "Panama Hat," and all the fabulous adventures it incited: from attracting thieves in a Brazilian rock shop ("like a flag printed with the words 'I'm rich'") to the jail time for his shaman friend, to his father's young girlfriend approaching him at the funeral with a story to tell. Wonderful poem!

* * * * *

From Colin James:

In "Crocodile King of Belize," Charlie Beyer is teaching me to be effectual. Like now I should be sitting on a South American pier about to throw a long line out, not waiting for my wife as she shops for eggs and some decent tea.

* * * * *

From Tamara Miles:

I visit these worlds.

I fear Charlie Beyer's rendered darkness, where Mayan children go missing, the javelina rummage, and police cannot be trusted. The Monkey River rolls on while women dig in trash for their next meal, and I am there consumed by uncertainty amid the characters, hoping against hope for a happy ending I doubt is coming. However, there are different kinds of happy endings, depending on who the hero is—

And deep into Jimmy Heffernan's compelling landscape, in his poem "Desert Ruin"—is it sacred or empty? The rattlesnake and hare live for a time together; it cannot last. One will make a move for survival. We do the same—

Then finally drawn into Raymond Souland, Jr.'s fiction *Labyrinthine*, its empty movie-house with hits of acid and "girlish hands softly on me." Then "a kind of library" (where I am always home)—

Where else can I travel so uncommonly than in the pages of *The Cenacle*?

* * * * *

From Leia Friedman:

After reading Joe Goodden's "The Beatles and LSD," I found myself simultaneously amused and disturbed.

George Harrison and John Lennon and their female partners were unknowingly dosed for the first time, and none of them knew what LSD

was. They partied and drove all over London that evening, fully tripping. Cynthia Lennon reported a difficult journey, particularly because she had no idea what was happening or when it would end. Later in the essay, Paul McCartney talks about how he felt tremendous peer pressure from the band to try LSD, and eventually caved.

No matter how amazing a drug is, it is never OK to dose someone without their consent. Pushing people to try something they aren't ready for is unethical and dangerous. Psychedelics are *not* for everyone. Psychedelics have changed my life, and I'm so grateful that I was introduced to them by people with integrity who cared about my well-being and safety. I hope that in this new psychedelic renaissance we can learn from the past and uphold values like consent, education, appropriate and fair access, and the individual's right to agency over their body.

Above all, though, I think it was a net "win" for humanity that the Beatles tripped their faces off for a while.

* * * * *

From Sam Knot:

Re: Nathan D. Horowitz's "Panama Hat":

*We trace a curious thread
of causation, tempting us
to draw lines that may not be there
between witchcraft, and teaching English, say.*

*At witch point things blur, although
we do our best to show how reasonable
the leaps we are making must be, because
that is how it happened, I thought? Maybe.
But . . . for sure we can always come back to*

*objects like these
black-banded hats
that wear stories.*

* * *

Re: Colin James's "Surveillance of The Grammarians":

*Clearly some people
walk like they write,
which must be akin to
walking one's talk—poetry
just sitting there, isn't she?*

* * *

Re: Judih Haggai's haiku:

*nothing simple
about how sweetly
these moments explode*

*as I consider how
to honour you, a swallow
flies in & out the window*

* * *

Re: Charlie Beyer's "The Crocodile King of Belize":

*What I learnt in that school
overgrown by the jungle, added up
to more than sums.*

* * *

Re: Jimmy Heffernan's poetry:

Are these the vows of being and becoming?

*A confused intelligence might be
confused because it is intelligent
or intelligent because it is confused?*

*Confusion and intelligence
spoke their vows, those of being
and in so doing, becoming
a happy marriage.*

*The last lines of "Desert Ruin"
speak to my soul, in particular:*

*"These precious pearls of being, left alone
Are what make living possible*

*Without them not to know about
We'd have nothing"*

*Compounded negations end up
saying **much positive stuff!**
What cannot ever be here
must be there
fore: forever?*

* * *

Re: Ace Boggess's poetry:

*Money down the drain
can be well spent I see
that soul grows a gutter grin.*

*I suppose when you're sad
at your happiest you're better
than happy: fool-y alive?!*

* * *

Re: Gregory Kelly's poetry:

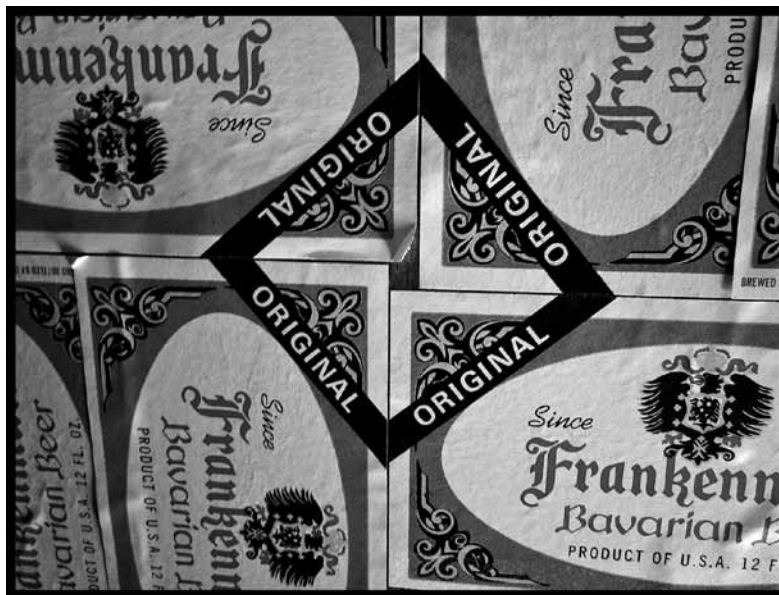
*I breathed with Gregory Kelly
it was something like the ocean breathes
and all along the shore the little pebbles
were letters, atoms of breath unbreaking
on the shore, sure enough, we wound up
as the wind, a shiver with which the oak
shook off the summer, like water after a dip.*

* * *

Re: Tom Sheehan's poetry:

*Tom Sheehan abstracts a concrete poem
from an empty room that is anything but
from a moment of being very present
with all the possibilities of past
and somehow in these words very precise
and present, this meaty natural language
begins to dream, and reality becomes depth.*

* * * * *



What is Your Earliest Childhood Memory?

Published on electrolounge.boards.net.

Post by Raymond on May 3, 2019 at 11:35am

I think this could be a fun discussion. I remember when I was about 5, this being 1969 or so, we had that very day, my family that is, moved into a new house in Connecticut. First house bought by my family, likely on the government first-time mortgage plans they had back then, trying to get people from apartment rental to house ownership.

I met three African-American children in the neighborhood. Siblings. Older sister Lisa, younger twins Kevin and Kimberly. I would know them well for the next 8 years or so. Lisa once broke my thumb in the middle of a street game.

I believe my parents went to McDonald's that first day. For lower-middle-class suburban kids, this was the supreme treat. Honestly, it still kind of is for me when I go there (not often but once in awhile). I think too I was on a bike, maybe with training wheels, that first day. Gosh, I just realized this was 50 years ago! *Sheeeet*.

* * *

Post by Nathan on May 3, 2019 at 11:39am

1. Sitting on a high chair, eating something, watching how my hands were working, and thinking "I'm better at this than I was some time ago."
2. Sitting on a high chair, eating half a bowl of cottage cheese, then up-ending it on my head because that felt nice and was funny.

* * *

Post by KD on May 4, 2019 at 12:22pm

1. Probably age 3 or 4 or so: A night watching TV with my dad and my siblings. My mom must have been at a meeting or something that night, which didn't happen often, so this was sad and odd. I remember hearing the theme from *Cheers*—and it has always made me a little melancholy because of this memory.
2. Just a little older, maybe 4 or 5: I remember there being some gathering at our house, and for some reason, I went outside by myself (which was odd with so many kids around all the time) and was trying to go across the monkey bars on the swing-set. I remember falling and getting the air knocked out of me, and hiding til it passed because I knew I wasn't supposed to be out there by myself.
3. Around that same age: Riding my dad's horse behind the old house in the pasture and the horse getting spooked by a snake, bucking me off, and my dad making me get back on.

4. Again maybe 3 or 4: My younger brother and I were in the dining room of our old house, which wasn't used as a dining room but more as a mudroom. I was sitting on the floor, and he was walking around me, peeing on me. My mom promises that this never happened.

* * *

Post by Nathan on May 6, 2019 at 5:56pm

3. A dream about dinosaurs. The ground is black and the sky is orange. I see the dinosaurs in silhouette. Roaring in rage and fear, a tyrannosaur falls into a trap in the ground.

* * *

Post by ThePsychedologist on May 6, 2019 at 8:54pm

I'm about 3 years old, sitting in the grass in the side yard of our house on the Merrimack River. It's a sunny spring day. My grandmother, Babi, is gardening wearing yellow gloves. There's a bird's nest on the corner of the house, and a baby bird has fallen out. Babi notices and she comes over to me, shakes her yellow finger in my face and says "don't touch it!" with a thick Czech accent. She crouches down, picks up the baby bird, and lifts it up, placing it back in the nest.

* * *

Post by Nathan on May 7, 2019 at 9:17am

4. I reach under the chair for the toy. The Old English Sheepdog, Koonie Lemel, named after a Yiddish actress, is under there, hot and cranky. She thinks it's her toy. And, anyway, she was with my parents first. She bites my arm. My mom finds a new home for her and gets Nellie the Newfoundland, named after my mom's aunt.

5. The house on the corner of Church and Oakland. It's a duplex, and the guy in the other side has a beautiful, friendly Golden Retriever. The next-door neighbors are an old Greek couple and they give me candy when I greet them.

6. In the basement, Nellie gives birth to eight puppies like wet black balls. No relation to the Golden.

* * *

Post by GreggKel on May 7, 2019 at 4:18pm

Ha! Cool idea @raymond. I took a night and dwelled on a memory not too long ago . . .

There's a memory
A single cinematic scene
A balled up chewing gum wrapper
stowed in the dusty corners
where the mind
meets the heart
I was a boy then
who just learned
to ride a bicycle
single handed

And it was a cocktail of joy and freedom
 And speed accelerating the wind
 the revving Topps
 against the spinning spokes

I was spinning the terra firma on its axis
 with each peddle stroke
 fulfilling my divined appointment

And to prove my pride
 I took the music box
 the porcelain pinned orchestra
 and wound the lamellae

Cello Suite No. 1
 Its prelude
 Bearing peace and moving the soles
 of my feet
 to again
 fulfill a destiny

With music box in hand
 The steel frame steady
 The earth's orbit in tow

I set off on the circuit
 that would see
 divinity cannot be
 counterbalanced with pride

The Cello Suite
 plummeted
 from transcended
 heights

And s h a t t e r e d

The memory:
 A Prelude
 to the monumental task of
 sweeping up what is broken
 and puzzling the symphony
 back together again

* * *

Post by Martina on May 13, 2019 at 5:26pm

I think I was 2 or 3 years old. My darling, young Aunt Jan was “jitterbugging” with me in her living room. She kept swinging me through her legs and then swinging me up high. She was wearing an apron over a flowery dress, her hair was down and shiny and smelled good, and I was incredibly happy. She always made me happy. I adored her. (R.I.P)

* * *

Post by Judih on May 14, 2019 at 11:45am

I remember sitting with my back towards a wall. Entering the hallway, in a ray of light from the open front door, a woman approached me. I saw her loose brown hair and how she was grinning wildly at me. I was in Allentown, Pennsylvania, in a duplex apt. Age: 3 or less I remember not wanting to be scooped up into this woman’s embrace. She was too energetic, too much. The memory is filled with the vividness of energy: hers compounded by the radiant sunlight that seemed to propel her in my direction.

* * *

Post by TamaraMilesSC on May 14, 2019 at 1:25pm

This is not the earliest, but I remember riding my bike fast down a steep hill when I was about eight, and wrecking and sliding and ending up with a scar I still have today, though it is hardly noticeable. It didn’t matter. I still loved riding, and I still do. I feel incredibly free on a bike with the wind lifting and guiding me. I have a photo of me on a bike from those days. I hope I can find it.

* * *

Post by Jimmy on May 20, 2019 at 8:44pm

I can clearly remember being dropped off at day-care at the age of three for the first time. My dad was driving a two-door Buick Regal at the time, and my mom was going back to work. I cried violently for a long time.

I also think I can vaguely remember a two-year-old memory, when I was bitten by my aunt’s dog at her apartment in Paris when we went on (my first major) vacation. It’s fuzzy though. Later in the trip I sampled wine in Bordeaux, and smiled ear to ear. I have pictures that can prove this.

* * * * *

Tamara Miles & John Echem



Two Seekers Drowned in the Rio Grande

In Memoriam:

Óscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez and his daughter Angie Valeria

Passed June 23, 2019

i.

Be watchful—twilight will come.
From what country, the witness?

*From shrouds of melancholy,
our lives immured.*

From what country, the guest?
We look for landmarks.

In the night, something is missing.

*Landscape wistful, heart wishful
—wind hisses.*

In the night, something missing.

To what end, our neighbor?
We forget to go home.

Night is gone—luminous, altered.

Now we mourn.

*Many roads lead home,
many homes without roads,
to the marshland of the soul.*

At how many harbors
does the other lose his way?
How far is he from a shaman's gaze?

*In pathless woods,
Arctic horizon, shingled by time,
he harbors beside a babbling brook.*

Where light comes from,
A trace of sadness.

ii.

For whose sake does our guest
turn aside?

*Our guest, our guest—
A hole in the sky, a hole in my mind.
Time traduces us as suspects.*

For whose sake does the refugee
seek the road back,
never knowing how?

Crossing the frontier, something missing.

For whose sake does our guest
wander aimlessly,
trying to remember?

*For whose sake these wistful winds
sing dirges, and shawl the glades
with grief?*

*For whose sake, for whose sake,
friend, from ether spills like Prometheus
the muse?*

*For whose sake dusk grows
from chrysalis of dawn?*

To what end does the hero
turn aside all through his life?

*Perhaps by time disarmed,
chiming bells wobble with footsteps
in the dark.*

Lost in broad daylight,
A phone ringing somewhere.

*The earth is deaf—
the Arctic, eccentric, ignores
a ringing bell.*

iii.

From which dreams
does the other come singing,
never knowing how?

*From which sphere the soul,
woolgathering, steers to realms
far from here,*

penniless, thirsty,
on the edge of the world?

*Between lips and glass,
an acre of wish . . .*

In whose arms does the victim
make his way,
not knowing why?

*To which abode, purging souls—
(a churchyard yawns)
do contagions go?*

Against the light, *Oh God!*
night will come.

*Am weary with calling
beyond the tides foaming,*

shining, nameless, trying to recall
an unreliable map.

*Surreal, this landscape—
from womb I escaped
to return to the grave.*

With what regrets did my father
wander aimlessly,
never knowing how?

iv.

*The paths that found my father
found me too, beyond beyond
and farther.*

What will I do?

*Tell me, dear friend,
your face smudged by drowned
mascara.*

Across the water, a phone
ringing somewhere.

After how many voyages
does a god look for landmarks?

*Across Zamora, a nibbling soul
in the dark. From the inner dome of ether,
a ringing phone grumbles with verse,*

and the world is made new.

* * * * *



**Log.**

While you sleep, wintery, someone
 is filming birds in the sunshine spring
 —looking up—tight-framed—into branches—
 tracking a blue tit before a blue sky—lagging
 just a little behind those feathered teleportations
 to fix on that shining black eye—but think!
 There is no white face wearing the bandit's mask
 —a beard of blue & yellow—
 & where should be the beak
 is a hole like the dot of a question mark

(?)

This time we follow at flight's own pace
 —the body—a single morphing shape
 of stored secrets—this fluid flash
 in which wing's tricks are dreamed
 within arm's reach—the bird is a tiny
 undiscovered monkey!

& how many know who else might be
 swinging through the trees of this
 once-thought well-categorised country?

I suppose now I have proof

(?)

So let's lie here, in thrall to recording dreams
 —you know—for a moment it seemed
 I could remember almost
 all those other times.

* * *

That Witch

When suddenly the sky spilling over
 Locked the engine in the chest
 The terror thought stopped
 The present waited to understand
 This time a different one
 Who watches the child
 In the garden where the woman curses
 The plane with spit words

Whose meaning holds itself over
 The metal in the sky
 Shock magic of meat power over
 Machine roar making the sun purr
 Making it personal making it all
 Personal
 That which has no choice but to vibrate
 With the engine in the chest the memory

Of which the gut flutters into space
 To face inside out the world it palpates
 That which has no choice but to choose
 The invasion of consequence
 Of holy shit language over
 The recontextualised rawplane
 That which the sky cannot shut out
 That great black and blue wound

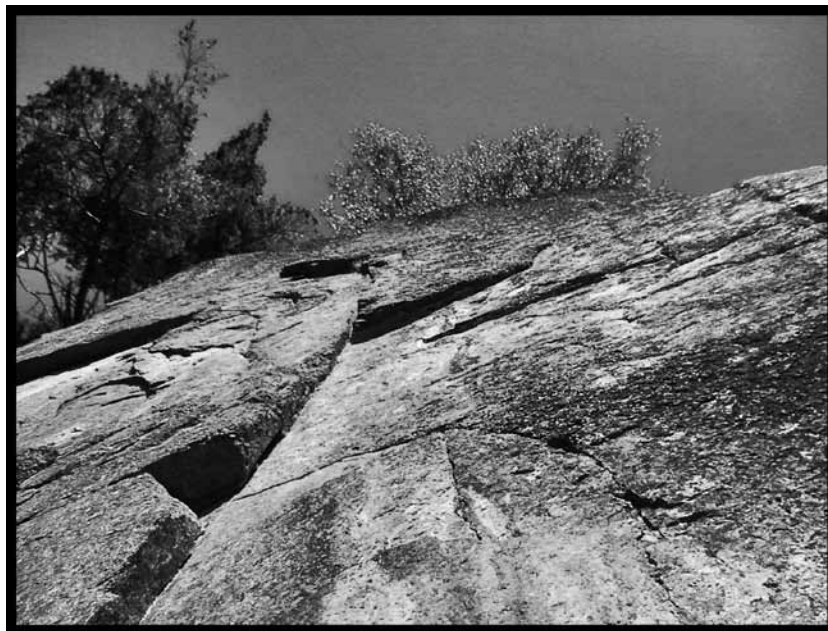
That soft wet grey scabbing over
 That green burial of bomb handles
 Those rusty talismans perched
 As shrapnel birds which nest
 In future mother of farther and
 Father past that grave commune of time
 That immemorial garden of one thing over
 Itself against itself trying all the errors

To lessen the holdings of memory over
 That witch curse hurls
 The backgarden warp lane poetry over
 The weeding and writing over the beaches
 The clifftop gifts from those who thought
 They fought forgetting those who fight
 To remember the right worlds to fight
 Within the flight within the flowers

To Turn The Vegetable Earth Into
 The Wild Soul The Sky Roars Over

Spilt words split worlds to talk over
 No one to sing into oneself in two
 Directions to roar in freedom
 To shelter eden even
 In the cursed garden overawed
 Swearing by this plane of existence
 To recall the necessary story each time
 The World Flies Over

* * * * *







Vines and Vignettes

[Travel Journal]

We don't know how the US election went. I'm heading to Lago this Saturday with Joaquín and Mark. Dave's leaving soon to be at his apartment in Baños for a while.

Doña Alicia, her honey-colored face a map of wrinkles, was visiting this morning. I poured her a cup of plantain chucúla. A bit of the sweet, yellow, fibrous goop slopped on the rim. I handed the cup to her.

"*Deóhi*," she thanked me, her face expressionless.

Dave took me by the elbow and led me aside. His dark eyes flashed. "You shouldn't have done that."

"What?"

"Served it to her with the stuff on the rim of the cup. They don't do that here."

"I didn't know it was a problem."

"It means you're trying to bewitch her if you do that. She might think you're trying to kill her."

"Are you crazy? She doesn't think I'm trying to kill her!"

"What makes you so sure about that? That's what they believe here. I'm only letting you know so you don't make the same mistake again."

"You think she thinks I was trying to kill her? Look at her drink it!"

"Nate, I feel that you need to find some humility in your heart. You walk around here sometimes like you think you know everything. I've spent most of the past seven years in the jungle and, to be completely honest with you, I know better than you do how these people think. Try to find some respect: for me, but most of all for them. OK? And remember that when you behave badly, it reflects on me, because the Secoyas consider me as a kind of chief of the gringos here."

"What? You're not my chief?"

"Yeah, but they see me as the chief of the gringos."

"For your information, I only have one chief here, and that's Joaquín."

"Nate, I'm asking you to *respect these people's beliefs* and try to find a little more humility in your heart. Please meditate on that."

"Get out of my face!" I nearly said that out loud. Instead, shaking with anger, I turned away and picked up the big aluminum pot full of dirty dishes. Balancing it on my shoulder, I strode down the muddy path away from the hut. The mud felt good, cool and clean, on my bare feet. I navigated the slippery clay stairs and reached the sandy edge of Haiya, the Aguarico River. Silently greeted it, and the bubbles gliding on its smooth brown surface. Squatted down in the sand at the edge and rinsed everything, glad for the peace the task afforded. Scrubbed the pots with big handfuls of sand before getting to work with the soap and scouring pad. Was soothed by the cool water and the heavy, wet sand, and the way the suspended particles swirled and swirled in the water like a perfect piece of visual art.

Fucking asshole. He acts like he owns the Indians. He's not my goddamn chief. I'd be just as glad if he wasn't around here. Things were fine before he showed up.

Why couldn't I have told him to fuck off? Maybe to help preserve the peace? What kind of a peace

is this? He slapped me down. I couldn't stand up to him. I'm sick of the patterns of my personality! Of all the responses I've developed over the years! Why can't I change?

I have a hard time reconciling the fact that I'm a free-floating bit of consciousness with the fact that I have habitual patterns of thought and behavior. Weakness! My father! But it isn't him anymore! It's me!

The recurrent memory of my persistent incapacity felt like a blow to the back of my head. A familiar feeling.

I sought sympathy from the river, but like the madman in Lago Agrio, it was cheerful in the face of my sadness. A bush at the edge of the water, though, had dead branches down below, gray and stripped of leaves, defeated by life and transformed by the sun and the rising and falling water. I felt like that plant, part of me dying. How sad it must be for plants when their limbs die. Or do they even care at all?

* * *

Clinton won. The day before yesterday I bought two little boas in Lago Agrio, born on October 26. Four bucks for the pair. The guy who sold them to me said he was helping build a road and its path went through their nest. They're exquisite and move in slow motion. They're on my arms now, cool brown and black bracelets that squeeze me.

My sculptor friend Elias Ramirez sold me a basket to keep them in.

Dave's gone to Baños for a while. Good riddance.

"*Este, quiere sacar, yo,*" mutters don Joaquín: This, wants to take out, I. "*¡Carajo!*" he swears. He and Mark are cleaning a muzzle-loading shotgun. "*Tiene que pensar bien,*" he says: We have to think carefully about this.

The boas wrap and coil around my wrists; my fingers; up my arms; around my neck. I feel pretty sad right now. Do you mind if I talk about my feelings? I have to think carefully about this. I got a bunch of sweet letters from Ricki, written before she got my letter breaking up with her. I've read a bit of each one. I hurt inside and think about her hurting inside. She's just a being. Just a little fragment of tender consciousness, like all of us.

* * *

Joaquín took us out in search of ya'i vines for the roof. We hiked half an hour out a hunting trail and found them dangling from the canopy, thin and strong. He told us the longer the lengths of vine we pulled down, the longer our lives would be. We coiled the vines and brought them back and soaked them in plastic basins. Next day, we split them down the middle with knives.

* * *

Mark and Gus and Joaquín and I were working on the roof. As we were tying palm fronds to roof poles with long sections of ya'i vine we'd collected and soaked and split with knives, Joaquín paused and remarked, "Marco is an excellent *yagé* drinker. Toanké, too, is fairly good."

Getting skipped over in the distribution of compliments touched a nerve in Gus, who cried hard, shaking, while his younger brother murmured "Gus, Gus," and patted him on the shoulder. Joaquín ignored the two of them and tied a second and a third knot around the palm frond he was installing. Only a simple overhand knot would work; the vines would splinter if made into double knots. But those overhand knots were tight and strong and, under ordinary circumstances, would never budge until they disintegrated with the passage of time—six or seven years.

I was miffed about coming in second in the ranking of *yagé* drinkers, and I don't know why he said Mark was better than me, but I can't imagine envying Mark. He's too humble for that. He doesn't

make any trouble for anyone. He lives the kind of selflessness that people like Dave and me can only imagine, and he doesn't talk about it.

* * *

The poetic inspiration I asked the universe for hasn't arrived. Bugs have. Seldom does a bug bring poetry, as that one talented night-fly did two years ago with the line "What makes the crow fly delirious with cunning?" Typically, bugs bring aggravation. Verily, nothing bugs like bugs. The present specimens swarm around me like planets around a sun, electrons around a nucleus, paparazzi around a celebrity, worshippers around a god.

*Sometimes you get
inspiration,*

*sometimes you get
bugs.*

*If you leave a lot of white space
when you write*

*(this is what
we learned
in boarding school)*

*you
get
...
(wait for it)
...
(just a moment now)
...
poetry.*

*Silence
speaks for itself.*

Fuck.

*We're out of
...
white
...
rice.*

Turned on his side in a hammock like a superannuated embryo, curled like a comma, Joaquín drifts, swaying, eyes closed, his handsome face placid. Mark pours brown rice into an aluminum pot for dinner. Nobody likes brown rice, but it's good for us, so we eat it. When it's cooked, I'll mash in boiled yellow plantains to sweeten it. Gus is dicing chili peppers from the bushes outside for the third

ingredient: a hot sauce with water, fresh lime juice, and salt. I check in with the green ceramic bead on the hemp choker around his neck; it looks back at me calmly.

There are a number of things I don't understand, beginning with myself: *Why this body, this face, this skin, these hopes and fears?*

The wind chime chimes as Joaquín sits up.

* * *

There's a palm fruit in season now called the *morete*. It has a big pit like an avocado's; a thin layer of smooth, rich orange pulp; and a scaly rind like dark red reptile skin. Yesterday, a Quichua guy brought three huge sacks of them to us from a *moretal*, a swamp where *morete* palms grow. Maribel has been boiling the fruits to make an oily, fruity *chicha*. *Chicha* usually means yuca beer, but in a secondary sense it means a drink made from a boiled fruit semi-dissolved in water. The *morete chicha* just kept getting better and better the four times she has served it to us. A bowl of it makes a full meal.

The Quichua just strode in from the forest and heaved the heavy bags of *moretes* onto the ground with a broad smile and greeted Maribel. I heard Rufino's name mentioned. Maribel accepted the gift with the flash of a smile, and the man—around 30, taller than average, strongly built—drifted over to me and shook my hand firmly. He told me his name, which I immediately forgot—Miguel or Manuel, probably.

"Are you Secoya?" I asked. "I thought I heard you talking to doña Maribel in Spanish."

"I'm Quichua," he said.

"You live around here?"

"I'm hiding from the Mafia," he said. "I used to work in Germany as a bodyguard for them. I have a baby son over there."

"For real?"

"Yup. They hired me 'cause I can fight. I used to be the boxing champion of Sucumbios Province. And I fought in the war against Peru."

He pulled up the fabric of his nylon track pants to reveal an impressive amount of scar tissue on his legs. "Got hit with shrapnel from a hand grenade. That wasn't the only time I saw combat. Everyone in my squad was either from the coast or the jungle except one guy who was from the mountains. Once we were crossing a swamp. Peruvians opened fire. Bullets were whizzing by. We lowlanders dove into the mud. The guy from the mountains, though, he had to stop and think. In that second, the Peruvians hit him. He survived, but only 'cause we packed three meters of intestine back into his abdomen once the firefight was over."

One story snaked around to another. "A few years ago," the Quichua went on, "in the village where I lived, an anaconda swallowed a little boy playing in the river. The other kids ran and got the boy's dad. He chopped off the snake's head with a machete but couldn't stop it from leaving. The man only recovered his son's body by canoeing two kilometers to a lagoon, where the snake had lived, and then, finally, stopped moving."

"That's nuts."

"Yeah. Well, gotta head off," said the Quichua. "Night's comin' on. Good talking to you." We shook hands and he vanished into the forest.

* * *

Speaking of dangerous animals, there seem to have been some kind of sea lions on the Aguarico and all around there, but now they're extinct, or nearly so. Rufino says that two years ago, a tour boat saw a big old one in a lagoon in Cuyabeno.

Not exactly sea lions, but river lions, maybe. That's close to the Secoya name for them, *ocoyai*,

water jaguar. They're the people of the goddess or spirit *Ocó Wanteancó*. Fernando's book has a story about them raiding a house and killing people. It makes sense. You're a colony of carnivores with big sharp teeth, and some meaty primates live nearby; you get hungry; what do you do? In more recent times, most mammals have chosen not to eat humans, a wise political choice. Still, some stripy yellow-and-black holdouts in India and a few tawny ones in the western United States refuse to submit to the new world order.

A member of the weasel family went semiaquatic: the otter. Maybe a member of the cat family did too. Maybe *ocoyais* only recently went extinct. Maybe they've moved into another dimension like the extinct mammals in my dream in Real de Catorce. Maybe *ocoyais* are imaginary and it's dumb to wonder about them. What would Indians know about animals in their forest, anyway?

In college, I read a book that said that animals on top of the food chain disappear first when there's an impact on an ecosystem. If *ocoyais* lived here and then vanished, there'd be little or no trace of them today. Same with the *mero* and the *anyapeke*, two giant man-eating fish that are said to live in the rivers and streams around here. The jungle's a great recycler.

* * *

Gus left this morning, without much fanfare, still embarrassed about having flipped out on *yagé*.

* * *

The Quichua dropped off more *moretes* this afternoon. "Before the war, I worked for the narcos making cocaine across the border in Colombia. That was a fucked-up job. You pick coca leaves all day, stuffing 'em in huge bags. The bosses let you smoke all the *base* you want."

I said, "*Base*? What's that?"

He said, "Brown powder, halfway between coca leaf and cocaine. Helps you pick real fast. Some guys do that for a while, get addicted, lose weight, and die. Nobody can live that way for more than a few months. But there are always guys who need money and want to do it."

* * *

Today we took apart the house Joaquín and Maribel were living in the first time I came here four years ago—the stage of my first *yagé* trip, where I couldn't speak but only sing, then roared for the life I wanted.

Today's goal was to salvage the house posts, which Joaquín's planning to give to his cousin Mariano. The posts are made of cedar, and they're still good. They'd actually already been recycled, Joaquín told us; they'd been part of the Evangelical church the missionaries built downriver in Cuyabeno in the 1960s.

After hours ripping apart roof and floor under the punishing sun, we sat down in the remains of the shade and swigged water. I figured that was it. I said to Mark, "OK, I'm done."

He smiled. "No, you're not."

He was right. We started up again. After the rest, I felt better. We finished the job.

During a second break, Joaquín and I simultaneously noticed, on one of the stubborn cedar posts, a brown and gray gecko watching us, with a crazy stare and a wicked grin. Joaquín immediately smashed it with the flat of his machete, and it dropped to the ground, dead. I demanded, "Why'd you kill that lizard?"

"*Porque malo*," Joaquín responded evenly. Because (it's) evil. I went back to work thinking about the superstitions of indigenous people, about the Buddha of the Aguarico's murder of a defenseless

animal.

He's not a holy man on any terms but his own. Definitely not on board with the Western liberal program to protect all possible life that enters within the sphere of our power.

My mom might say I should bring modern thinking to these people to rid them of their ignorance. But to Joaquín, I'm the ignorant one. The frogs down by the river are evil too, he claims. Other animals are good, like the oropendolas, the egrets, and the woodpeckers that gave him their name for me.

* * *

Planning to go to the Ministry of Exterior Relations in Quito to request a volunteer visa to stay longer. I'll teach English in San Pablo, as discussed with Álvaro.

* * *

In My Night Mind

Rhyme *is* reason—
that's what the leaves seem to say.
The earth gave us so much today:
near Joaquín's old house,
a poem had taken the form
of a palm tree
arching over an arcane river,
and a lemon tree
bore grapefruit-sized lemons
like wrinkled suns.

How those lemons rhyme with the sun!
The old, wrinkly sun.

Plants were erupting in the jungle today
like slow, green sparks,
and the floripondio bushes
keep spitting up huge white flowers
to insult and tantalize us.

My two baby boas
are gliding over my hands as I write,
their tongues flicking out to taste molecules
drifting along the slowly-gliding wind.
How these two little snakes
rhyme with the wind.

* * *

9:53 a.m. On the other side of the river, dusky titi monkeys are whoop-chanting their theme song—a Möbius-strip rising-and-falling above the treeline, looping back on itself, as the beasts sing on the inhale as well as on the exhale—gulping in great chirping whoops of air, leaning forward to belt

out smooth, curving chimes again.

I woke at 3:30 to catch a 4:00 canoe to Chiritza that never came. Someone told me another canoe might go upriver at 3 p.m. I'm on edge, set to leave at any moment.

I caught myself staring into the ground, as if what I sought were contained there. Instead of punishing myself, I let myself go free, like snowflakes on fire.

I was in a bad place for writing before, I see that now. Here, the words flow free, in Mark's hammock in the provisional hut, under the tuneful buzzing of dozens of metallic green flies gathered beneath the roof for some inscrutable fly purpose. The sun winks with its big eyelid of cloud; the world dims, then brightens again; a broad, dry leaf hang glides to the ground. The wind plays the wind chime. The Swarovski crystal spits rainbows. It's a hyperactive heaven on earth here, the white wings of a white butterfly in the sun. White doesn't come much whiter than that. Ah, there are two of them now. Their aimless flight makes so much sense.

The small coil of a piece of dry vine lying on the ground by a house post, too insignificant for history to record. My basil and chili peppers drying in the sun. The sun serpent coiling and uncoiling, shooting off vining, untwining solar rays.

Welcome, photons!
I say out loud.
How was your flight?

Trees rock side to side, great shaggy beasts looking to have a wild rumpus or prey on a used-car salesman from Texas.

You can tell these metallic green flies above me are deep thinkers because all they ever say is "Hmmmmmm." Little eddies of contemplation in the cosmic flow.

Mark has planted seven coconut palms under this upside-down ocean of a blue sky.

From low grass at the edge of the patio emerges a lizard, mini-dinosaur, sleek yellow and turquoise racing stripes on his green body behind his brown head.

I feel more like I do now than I did when I woke up this morning.

By the time you read this, I will have been dead.

Before I die, I will make of my body a doorway through which you walk this jungle.

The wind comes in with a great *Hello!* and the plants wave back. The lizard's gone. The black mother chicken scratches for food, instructing her fluffy child, who's dark on top, lighter underneath, one of Fujimori's children; perhaps next year we will eat him.

Every time I come in here, I see more holes in the black plastic roof-tarp, scratched by the chicken feet of wind, rain, and sun, but we're not fixing them anymore, as we're planning to move into the new house soon.

After dinner last night, Joaquín was holding forth on the subject of miracles. "My grandfather, he was a boy, *yagé* ceremony, shamans singing, morning, going outside, everyone looking up in the sky. Seeing nothing, then something, very small, up high, very small, getting bigger. Getting lower. Lower. Lower. Bigger. It was a—" I didn't catch the word.

"A what?" I asked.

"A turtle," he said.

"A turtle?" I echoed.

"A turtle," he confirmed. "Floating down. Slowly. Slowly. This big!" He held his hands a meter apart and smiled delightedly. "When getting low enough, they taking it and killing, cooking, everyone eating soup. How delicious!"

* * * * *



Tom Sheehan


A Small Red Star for Me and My Father

This appointment came when light tired, this arrangement, this syzygy
 of him and me and the still threat of a small red star standing
 some time away at my back, deeper than a grain of memory.
 I am a quarter mile from him, hard upward on this rugged rock he could
 look up to if only his eyes would agree once more, and it's a trillion
 years behind my head or a parsec I can't begin to imagine,
 they tell me even dead perhaps, that star. Can this be a true syzygy
 if one is dead, if one is leaning to leave this line of sight
 regardless of age or love or density or how the last piece of light
 might be reflected, or refused, if one leaves this imposition? The windows
 of his room defer no light to this night, for it is always night there,
 blood and chemicals at warfare, nerve gone, the main one
 providing mirror and lethal lens, back of the eyeball no different
 than out front, but I climb this rock to line up with another rock and him
 in the deep seizure of that stolen room, bare sepulcher,
 that grotto of mind.

Today I bathed him, the chest like an old model, boned but collapsible,
 forgotten in a Detroit back room, a shelf, a deep closet, waiting
 to be crushed at the final blow, skin of the organ but a veneer
 of fatigue, the arms pried as from a child's drawing, the one less formidable
 leg, the small testes hanging their forgotten-glove residuum,
 which had begun this syzygy, the face closing down on bone
 as if a promise had been made toward an immaculately thin retrieval,
 and, at the other imaginable end of him, the one foot bloody
 from his curse, soured yet holier in mimicry of the near-Christ
 (from Golgotha brought down and put to bed, after god and my father
 there are no divinities), toenails coming on a darkness no sky owned,
 foot bottom at its own blood bath, at war, at the final and resolute war
 with no winner.

Oh, Christ, he's had such wars, outer and inner, that even my hand
 in warmth must overcome, and he gums his gums and shakes his head
 and says, sideways, mouth screwed into his outlandish grin,
 as much a lie as any look, as devious, cold-fact true, "I used to do this for you,"
 the dark eyes hungry to remember, to bring back one moment
 of all those times to this time; and I cannot feel his hand linger on me,
 not its calluses gone the way of flesh or its nails thicker now than they
 ever were meant to be, or skin flaking in the silence of its dust-borne battle,
 though we are both younger than the star that's behind us
 and dead perhaps, as said; then, in a moment, and only for a moment,
 as if all is ciphered for me and cut away, I know the failure
 of that small red star, its distillation and spend still undone,
 its yawn red as yet and here with us on the endless line only bent
 by my imagination, the dead and dying taking up both ends of me,
 neither one a shadow yet but all shadows in one, perhaps
 a sort of harmless violence sighting here across an endless known.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eleventh Series

*"Myriad lives like blades of grass,
yet to be realized,
bow as they pass."*

—The Shins, "For Those to Come," 2003.

lvi. Natural Bridge

The braided thread leads us to her
now, even my friends agreeably
let this be so. Its many twisted
color glows in my hand, urges me
hmmm to *pay attention, beware & be aware.*
My friends *hmmm* too, but do not have to *try*,
it is how they *are*. So many turns
in this Tangled Gate, more than possible.
Was this a thing I can honest say
I made, or were my dreams simply
how it passed to be into this universe?
The Gate's Gate?

When my thoughts weird & droop like this,
when my steps trudge & stumble,
my friends will nudge me rest.
We cluster under this White Birch now.
They nap peaceably in my lap by the mauve light.

The bulk of my long overcoat stirs me
restless. Rough pages of a handmade book I've brought
with me from my many miles & years.
Bits of diary, theory, ephemera.
Shards from a massive lingual crag, rude
steps on my way to this grassy seat,
these magickal Creatures, this careen
toward you. This warped careen.

"Love will warp your path!" Is that
what the small exotic man said that last time
we sat together with his friend the Tramp
outside the little shack at the Threshold
of the Dreaming?

We'd sat together many times as a kind
 of needed rite I'd discovered my first try
 to travel it. The Dreaming a unique
 stream through Dreamland, a way
 to collapse the border to waking,
 change the waking, change history,
 change human history & thus the
 worlds, so long sought.

But I wasn't coming back this time.
 My friends would let me do this.
 There was no other choice.

I'd sat that night, hundreds of years hence,
 writing my last thoughts, per chance
 it went wrong, per chance what the
 Dreaming spat out its far end were
 two inert bodies, not one.

These pages before me, many times folded
 & centuries worn. Start to see that
 awake now are the White Bunny, the Imp,
 the turtle not a turtle, gazing up from
 my lap. Expecting?

I read the old words I wrote hundreds
 of years from now. Choose the last pages
 of this book for them to hear.

"The force of human history was on the side of the fist, not the open hand. Both were powerful, but one spoke to the most helpless fears of mortal men, that whatever health or happiness or prosperity was achieved, it would not be maintained. Beat would slow, breath would stop, mind would cease. Not a billion preachers of a billion magickal, instructional, or just comforting words could prove otherwise."

They sniff, once each, but no further comment.

I read on. *"Proof, assurance, a reply to despair, lay beyond men's daylight lives of grab & fuck. Even as they belonged to their world in a way few could really know, their world belonged to something else. It lay in the open hands of those who had begat it from the ashes of other worlds, other men."*

My friends gaze me quietly. I speak
 my continuing thoughts as though
 they had heard them all. Which
 they may have.

"I brought the Blue Suitcase too.
 It was my lifeline tossed back me
 to find & give to her, give us all a chance."

They all sniff when I mention you.
Waiting me finish this to get along
to you again. I nod.

“The Tangled Gate preceded this world, & became source of human dreams, those nightly clues of worlds elsewhere, of many kinds, with offer of many threads. Dreams inspiring men to create, to build, to raise up civilizations.

“But it was not enough. Those who believed men apart from this world, superior to it, meant to feed blindly, & breed more feeders perpetually, & explain their exception to all other life as the will of an invisible hand they alone resembled, failed to understand that hand, that it held all equally.

“They failed to understand that it was many hands, that these hands more & more despaired, that these hands had contrived a child, not a savior, but one who would take of this world as it ended, something of it beyond it, to the next world.

“That as she passed through the Red Bag, she would become the world itself, its lessons, its losses, its beauties, its smallest sands, its heart living still as what the Emandians left behind was lost, as men did not save themselves, as their world did not recover its grand & subtle powers, as time itself ran out, & the last breath, & the last beat, & the last dream.”

I’ve never seen them study me so close.
For the words I have not written here too.
I tell them now more of what I’ve told none before.

“In Dreamland there is an indigo
shade to things, but only sometimes,
& not for long. Not a thing noticeable,
& certainly no instructions. I’d spent
fruitless years compiling notes like these”
& I smack my book with my hand—
They sniff uncertainly but hold their places—
“Only to realize the thread through time
was a series of hops with no way of
returning”—the White Bunny sniffs once at
my use of the word *hops*—“& these
rarely seen, short lived indigo shade
to things were the stops on the way.”

I sigh. “But to arrive back here,
to send along the Blue Suitcase of
needed tools”—gesture the braided thread
tucked amongst them—“needed a
breach back from where I came from.”



Sigh worse. "The Sleeping Capsule
 I contrived was tight. The potion bitter.
 When it would fill with the colored mist,
 it was more like death than dreaming.
 Red first, then drift to orange & yellow.
 Each its dream, yet still tight in the
 Capsule, still bitter taste on my tongue.
 Green next, then blue. So often I
 stuck there, the blue dream. Usually
 the saddest. Finally I trebled my
 dose, the poison in it fierce, but arrived
 to the violet dream. And this only to
 arrive the desert I spent years
 searching for the shack."

More sniffs. Impatient? Curious?
 Maybe they simple know my long
 sadness in this telling.

The White Bunny *hmmms* me, the others
 join in, urge me in, deep in.
 We go together now.

I found the shack, & the exotic
 little toothless man & his boon companion
 the tattered man. Called himself The
 Tramp. Took me hundreds of dreams
 to know sure they guarded the Threshold
 of the Dreaming.

They kept me each time I made it to
 them. The exotic little man liking me
 to click-click & noise-noise, cackle
 & gnatter with him. The Tramp would
 show me his rudely assembled book
 of pictures he'd drawn of those he'd
 loved. Long-haired wenches, bald warriors,
 blended beings of magick & muscle,
 songs of virgin sunshine on empty
 worlds, & cocks & cunts & torsos
 fucked, chewed, set aflame & held close.

I grew more desperate, more unwilling
 to return, failed, to waking. Drank
 more & more of the potion, wondering
 if dying my body how not to return.
 Each time I would fall
 away back eventually.

We are walking toward the shack
 now, my friends & me. I read them
 the rest of what I wrote that last
 night, when I drank all the potion
 I had, enough I was sure to kill me.

"I am going back to find you, if you will let me. Perhaps together we will save this world or, if we cannot, we will travel to the next world & do there what would could not here. I leave tonight."

We arrive the shack & my friends
 delight to greet the exotic little
 man & The Tramp. The Imp &
 the little man in his odd skull cup
 cackle wild happy together.
 The White Bunny & the turtle
 not a turtle sit with The Tramp
 on his little stool, sniffing, *hmmmming*,
 passing news as such magickal Creatures might.

I set on my stool, put my rude book
 inside my Blue Suitcase, with
 its box of colored threads &
 other tools. I watch them & wait.

Then, for the first time, the door
 of their shack is open & we all
 are walking in. Was this itself the
 Threshold to pass?

There are no walls in this shack,
 & it is immensely larger than possible.
 All around us are frozen rainbow waterfalls,
 sightlessly high. I stand helpless
 in this beauty for an ever of time.

Then aware of The Tramp & exotic
 little man speaking in some tongue.
 Embracing, sad, The Tramp very sad.
 My friends swarm the little man
 next, kissing affections such as shown
 the Princess. Nearly such. He nods
 me a twinkling something I cannot reck.

The exotic little man now grasps
 my elbow, about his height, &
 urges me close to one of the frozen
 rainbow waterfalls. He urges us study
 it close, cold & colder as we lean in,
 & pictures within it emerge.
 His usual cackling now more *hmmming*,
 which curls me in sweetly

We are among them, nothing solid
 for a long time. Endless, ancient
 Woods, great smoking cities mounds
 of wisdom & sentience, whole civilizations
 of men summed in sentence or an image,
 unknown depths of the Wide Wide Sea,
 & a Great Tree at the heart of the world.
 I know a little of some of these things
 from my many studies, but very little
 for all those years, all those sheaves
 I wrote.

Then we are walking, no, climbing.
 A slow rocky climb past old craggy
 formations, some the height of three men,
 then a curving stumble down more
 pressing stones, & the water's music
 below presses & presses closer, a watching,
 aware roar—

until comes a stone wall too tall
 before us to reck all, its ancient
 wizened face, not a face, but not
 not one.

No ancient eyes open. No croaking tongue
 speaks. Yet language, some kind unmined
 from inner breath & beat, like skin of
 man greeting skin of stone.

A choice. A chance to return.
 A chance, even, to give up this world
 for my old one. What I might be
 now, given the man I am become.

No. Be a king of my own world or
 find my place at your side, whatever
 this means?

A great rocky roar all about me,
the cackling stone itself makes?
I rise from my crouch & behold
a stone bridge endless into the
distance, decorated high & low
with many colored blooms.

I remember the exotic little man
& look among the rocky ruins
about me for any sign of him.
I find only his odd skull cap,
tuck it into my long overcoat, just in case.

This Natural Bridge proves the
next challenge in my passage
through the Dreaming. No wider
than a footbridge, living among
sometimes wild swirls of wind &
ice & rain & snow, covered in
blooms some of which dazzle my eyes
or nose to topple me off, cut my
feet to do so, dream me happy
arrived when I've taken just two steps!

But I think I see evidence of the
indigo shades too, ways to elude
falling & waking up yet again to
my nearly gone body in my Sleeping
Capsule, me now kept alive by others
who think I've got the answer to
save the world.

Maybe. Or just to save me & you.

I follow the indigo shades over
the Natural Bridge at last
&, amazing to the twisted strange
world of myself, I arrive fully
to a tent, long ago, midst of
some men's war. Your father
the King's war, Princess.

I look down & see my three dear
 companions, & there is no upset
 in them for this wild & weird thing
 I've told. I wonder again at all
 I do not know. I love you & I love her
 as I never have any, & will protect
 you all as I can. Whatever I am.

The White Bunny sniffs twice & leaves
 my lap, begins to hop slowly on,
 waiting us. Tiny Imp hops off me too,
 gnatters a song, followed by the Turtle
 who isn't a turtle, all of them singing now.

I stand. The braided thread in my hand
 glowing, & *hmmming* me on.
 I follow my friends, & keep
 wondering this world.

* * * * *

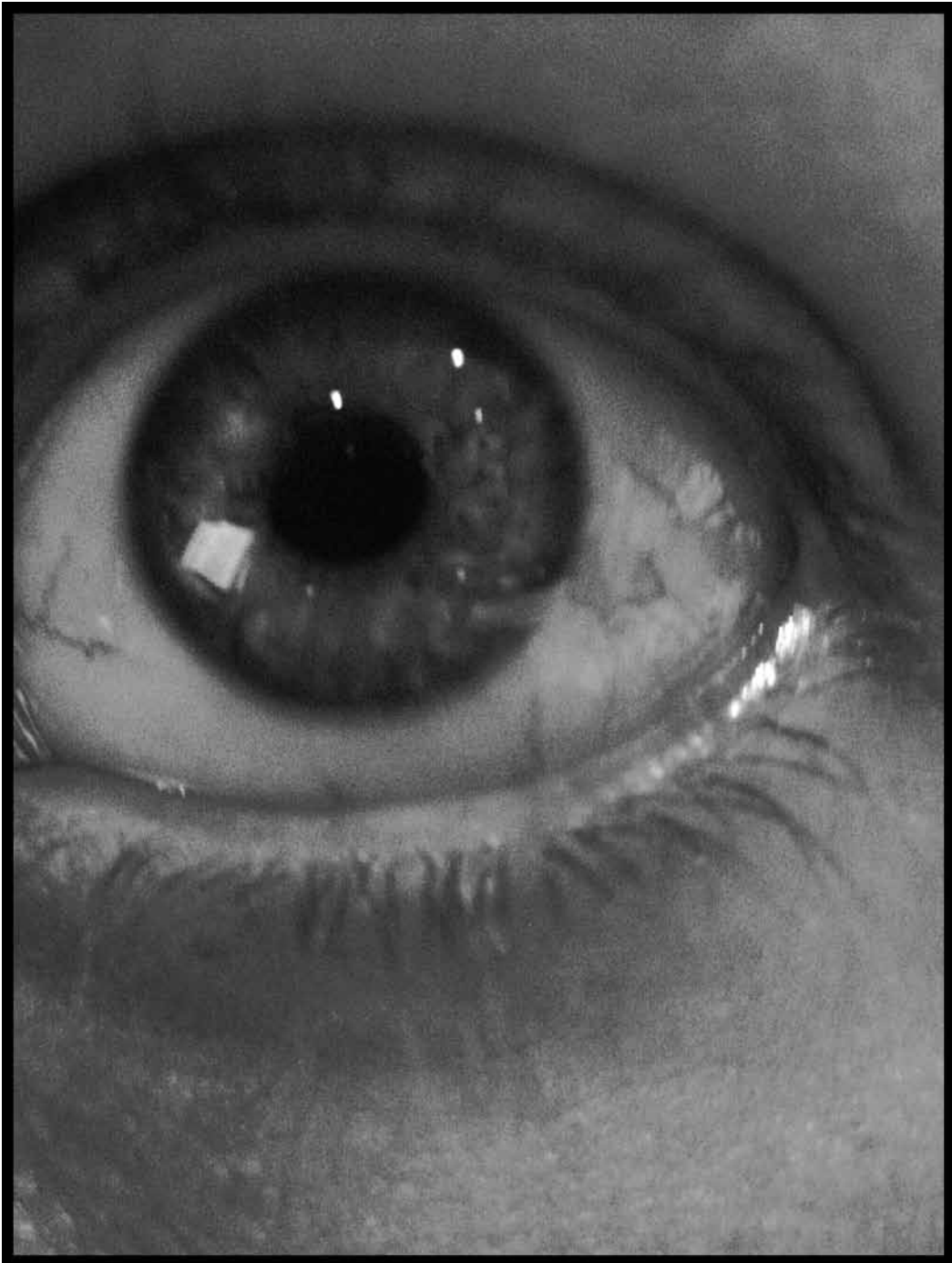
lvii. Away?

Suddenly, elsewhere. When I open my eyes,
 I find myself leaning against my strange
 friend from childly dreams. I still
 lean now, *I still trust him*.

He is like Creatures, like the White Woods,
 like the Island & the Wide Wide Sea itself.
 Mine to listen, know, wonder. Know *more*
 & wonder *better*.

He is playing our old game, nudging music
 from the air, giving it shape. His touch
 is light, gentle, but sure to its purpose.
 Turns to me with his strange smile,
 shows me his work. My friend the White Bunny.
 I am pleased. She solids, settles
 to this world. Sniffs twice. Takes my lap.

"Where are the others?"
 "She is here & there both."
 "Where are we?"
 "Near the road away."
 "Away?"



His look is sad. At first resembles
 the man I recall, then more like the
 Great Tree, a swarm of buzzing around
 it, Woods, Sea, Island; *of* all these,
among them, equally. No need a King
 to rule by his conquest of the world
 ever farther. He is not like my father
 who obsesses to break the wills of men
 & magicks alike.

“Who were those people? The Sleepers?”
 “The last of men. Your Architect’s people.”
 “They failed.”
 “Yes.”
 “Can it be different?”
 “Men learn slow. Easily forget. Fear. Sloth.”
 “*Can it be different?*”

Long silence. “Mold men’s fears
 to a fist, directed by mind to love,
 & serve green as source & best guide;
 this world as model to all the stars.”

The White Bunny naps in my lap
 as always. He makes to stroke her fur,
 hesitates, doesn’t.

“Can it be different?”
 “Just reorder your question’s words,
 Princess. Where there is life,
 there is choice.”

The Beast now lets me know him,
 embraces me fully among his branches,
 his buzzings, his Seas deep. His empty
 canyons, under full moons, his frozen rainbow
 waterfalls, his spring rains. His green buds,
 his curling leaves. His patterns of
 upheaval & calm. His epochs of ice
 & of green. His multitudinous pulsing,
 breathing, buzzing, swimming, soaring,
 mating & consuming.

Men are contrived from music &
 air, as much as Creatures.
 Will what will be by loose fists & shoddy minds,
 or by *green*, by *Dream*. Or *more*.
 Or *better*. *Serve the world. Love its magicks.*

I hug him like my beating & breath,
 my dancing, my music, my singing.
 My many loves. *Love him like them.*
I want to remember it all while away.

“Thank you, Princess. Safe journey. Goodbye.”

* * * * *

lviii. A Shimmer, A Break

The road away is long & straight,
 brown plains on either side, like something
 withholds from me here. Me an unsure
 stranger to what this is & why. But maybe
 also something wishes otherwise, sniffs at me,
 wills me sniff in reply.

Sniff twice, thrice, four times, a shimmer,
 nothing. I stroke the White Bunny,
 asleep in my lap, close my eyes,
 behold her legs extended, ears flying back,
 tug me a little nearer this, now more,
 find myself changing, thought & instinct
 one, tug a little deeper & I treble in time.

A shimmer, a break. Back, hence?
 Neither, both. None, one, many.
 Here is no time, & every time.
 The plains are brown, now green,
 now the Sea, skies above filled with
 starcraft? The road remains.

I hop forward, slow unsure, need to tug
 more clearly. Stop hopping, steady,
 close my eyes . . . feel around . . . There!
 A thread, but thick, like braided?
 I open my eyes now to see.

Have they always been amongst us?
Is this their processional away?
Am I one among them?

They are sad but something else too.
 Some kind of . . . waiting joy?
 A next world to come to, open hands,
 open doors, strange new chances.

Seeming unnoticed, I hop among their
 numbers. Their hierophants feathered up,
 like hawks & eagles. Their apprentices
 in rainbow garb, simpler, humble.
 Others luckier play instruments, pipes, guitars, horns,
 sometimes cluster & raise up stomping,
 howling songs.

Staying near the braided thread, I continue
 hopping forward through the processional,
 toward the glinting glaring thing ahead.
It is the Wide Wide Sea.

Distracted, delighted, I am become girl
 again, & wonder if this is the Island's shore,
 its same Sea? They are all one, I realize.
 One, many, none. The musicians, the apprentices,
 the hierophants even, are splashing, bathing
 one another. I keep a distance from
 all this when I am approached by a smiling
 man, familiar.

It is the Hero who abandoned me &
 the others to that other Island. He holds
 out open hands & bids me listen a moment.

"It was by the Architect I did all I did.
 His will led me through all my actions with you."

The surf, noise, & laughter cascades around us.

"Are you among this number?"
 "No. Not really. I was sent to guide you."

Silence. He looks closer at me, arrogance &
 brute expectation gone from his face. I wait.
 We sit together on the sand, watching
 all this revelry. He speaks again, not regarding me.

"I was raised by agreement between
 men & *our* people. Those who did not wish
 to leave. To find another way. My purpose
 to contact the Beast, ask his help.
 The words you gave me were for him.
 A surrender, a truce, that when
 you entered the Gate you would be aided
 to pass on."

“There’s no need for truce or surrender
between myself & the Beast,” I say
suddenly, firmly. “We are friends.
He would help me however I ask.”

He nods, confused. I smile him continue
his confession, like he’s practiced in his heart.

“The word you spoke to me, that night,
on the ship, it was the Architect’s
next instruction. It’s why you & they
are all here now. It’s why what
happens next.”

We sit quiet again, watching the celebrants
return from the water, dry & dress.
As more ready themselves, there is a sense
from them of waiting.

Long moment till I realize they can see me
now. “Waiting for me?”

He nods. His face changed. Neither arrogant
or uncertain. Steady.

“What my choice in this?”
He starts. “It is all by your choice. You decide
what will be.”
“When?”

He smiles, stands, offers his hand. Soft & strong.
Would still kneel low at a word, if I bid so.

We walk together among the crowds,
further along the road away, evening
now coming on.

“What did the Beast say to you?”
Silence. Then: “I asked him what a Hero is,
the part I was raised to portray.”
Silence. Then: “He said a Hero understands fear
in others’ hearts as well as he does in his own.”
I nod.

There are now many shouts ahead, fields by
 the road filled with tents, bonfires. Dancers &
 musicians. Stars heavy & light in the sky.
 I keep close to this Hero who understands.
 He coaxes me laughing to dance, some
 of his old swagger returning.

I let myself loose of all so battered down
 within me, loose to the fires, the music,
 the stars heavy & light. I don't know
 what the morrow will bring, I wonder
 about the Architect & my dear friends.

Then his strong hand smiling grasps round
 my waist &, for a merciful while,
 I don't wonder at all.

* * * * *

lix. Remembering the Masques

There seems still a long way to go by morning
 as everyone packs up to move along.
 The Hero tells me it is fasting day, but
 does not know what for.
 "I know little the whys of my makers," he says,
 without bitter. "They trained me for what
 we have done & are doing. I'm like a map
 with a single path, finite steps. A cypher."

I walk beside him, lightly trebling in time,
 wishing to know better the whys for us both.
 Our pace slow that I keep my steps about me.
 The Hero keeps my lips wet against the dry
 winter sun. Somehow still in the Tangled Gate?

Trebling does not help me to know better.
 And what I already know does not explain.
 As always when dismayed, I think of my friends
 during our best days in the caves & tunnels
 of my childly dreams. Them so importat,
 simple, & wise.



There were these masques that occurred
 rarely, when the caves & tunnels would be
 entirely decorated by my arrival, everywhere
 instruments & singing, more kinds to meet &
 know than usual. My friends would insist
 on my head a crown of vines & pebbles, &
 that I presided over all as they wished.

One in particular, & very strange.
 I knew my dear friends by their guises
 as Woods sprites, sunshine, red berries,
 laughing fancies. But there were others, too,
 not Creaturely in form. They gathered round me,
 these beautiful yet so aerie forms of
 men & women, smiled me in ways
 impossibly sad & loving both.

I wondered their strange tongue, yet not
 so foreign to me, as they sang to me
 in one long braided voice:

*“When the colourous lights have dimmed,
 when the music has slowed to smoke,
 when there is sniff of calm night & then no more,
 when touch brittles, maybe to break,
 when best taste is old & cold, hurts—*

*“The Red Bag, doorway back to Dreaming—
 The Red Bag, the path, come,
 The Red Bag, come, trust, **come here.**”*

I see now twice, thrice, many along
 this road, as braided a sight along this
 road away as their voices in my memory.

I am with my friends in this masque.
 I am waking wet spring morning in my
 bed in the Pensionne
 I am swimming my all to make this
 Island's shores.

I reach along, further on & back, deeper
 braiding all this disparate. Falling forever
 from the stars & skies, down deep forever
 into the Wide Wide Sea. Standing yet
 hidden among a friendly number surrounding
 a small hut in the White Woods.
 Living far times from now in a city,
 in a castle, in a farm's strange red house.

The Hero catches me sudden & leads me
 off the road. We sit in peaceful grass,
 the day warm but kind. He makes me drink
 water, looks around once, feeds me
 something like a handful of fruits & nuts
 from his knapsack. Tenders my strange,
 deep weakness.

A sudden good thought & I take from my
 pocket the few things I still carry.
 Knife, brush, my totems. One resembles
 my tiny gnattering Imp friend. I press her
 into his hand. "A gift."

His face fears, retreats. She cackles, friendly,
 & I smile him too, the lush girlish smile
 he once longed to possess his own.

I speak him quiet, serious. "You're the Hero
 they guised you as. No longer a simple path
 or a cipher."

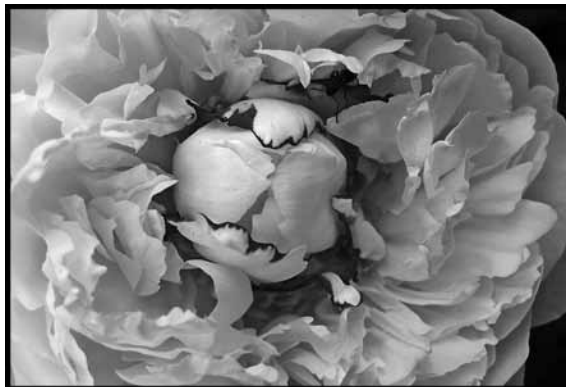
He is quiet, helps me up. We walk among
 the hierophants, apprentices, musicians.

"I would defend your life from any & all."

I nod. I take his hand in bonding friendship.
 Such an act ours together to do.



* * * * *





Sadie Sings to Her City

Impenetrable Los Angeles!
 You are California's bitch, so to speak;
 Berkeley's black sheep brother,
 San Diego's alcoholic uncle,
 and San Francisco's drug-addicted niece.

It doesn't bother me, love.
 You have been my mother,
 and the aunt who formed me,
 and the long-haired lover who sexed me
 out of my clothes and out of my mind.
 (A monstrous clarity that tickles my nerve endings
 embraces all those moments even now.)

The social contract that binds more civilized cities
 has very few signatures from Angelenos.
 Somehow that particular contract was placed on a butcher block
 as soon as early citizens began to build this city.
 The only contract here is the one between
 the demons and angels who fight their gang wars daily.
 Socialization is on a need-to-know, one-on-one basis.

Blessed city that helped me stop fawning
 over failed traditions! You gave me
 victory over expectation,
 laughter over lost opportunities,
 choices to wear sudariums or skinny pants.

Every other place I have been has been a trailer,
 a preview of the main attraction.

Like me, you are dissonant to the end,
 an unresolved chord looking for beauty and beginnings,
 eternally finding them in the big finish of heavy traffic,
 and the sirens,
 and your own angry heart,
 which never stops pounding.

* * *

Morning on the Ugly Pond

When you shut your eyes,
you notice that all around you
are small noises.

The oars cut through murky water
as if the green muck on the surface
oiled them.

There are short, sharp cries,
calls that echo across this pond
from insects that look as though
they ought to growl.

Water slaps on the stones at its edge,
an undeserved spanking given
in a kind of gray-green rancor,
because this place is less beautiful
than it wants to be.

Small boat, large pond,
grass that is tall and gray-green.
It bends over the backs of turtles
who are equally not comely
and also gray-green.

Ill-favored old pond!
Still, here we are,
and there are dreams
that float alongside us,
and the small sounds call to us
and to themselves.

They say that beauty's not given
to everything or everyone.
Sometimes the best that shows up
is the longing for beauty,
the hope and hunt for it,
and oars to get you
from where you are
to somewhere else.

* * * * *



Same Moon Shining

[Memoir Excerpts]

Theories

The ongoing mystery of my biological grandfather has been a source of frustration. I now know his name—Leroy D. Allen—and the date of his marriage to my grandmother—but, other than that, I can't seem to find any information about him before or after his brief role as father and husband in 1941 and 1942. While I wait and search, I theorize. This is what human beings do when we are faced with a mystery: turn it around and around in our minds, peel back the layers, and try to discover the answer to fit the missing pieces together.

At the beginning of Tennessee Williams' 1944 drama *The Glass Menagerie*, when Tom Wingfield describes the characters in this memory play, he includes his absent father, who is always present as a reminder of what is missing. The telephone man who "fell in love with long distances" remains in a photograph on the wall, and in a single postcard that says hello and goodbye. His abandoned wife constantly worries that Tom is becoming like his father, and it is obvious to the audience that her irritating reminders are going to produce exactly the effect she has hoped to avoid.

When we are advised that the apple doesn't fall far from the tree, we should take into consideration that this may be true because it is what people expect. It is what children may expect of themselves—that they will grow up to be like the parents they may wish so desperately not to imitate. I alternately laugh and cringe when I realize that my father's obsession with food has become an issue for me as well. We both treat our anxiety with food, and we do it with particular abandonment at night when normal people are sleeping. We are both carbohydrate addicts, which is troubling because he is a diabetic, and I may have a genetic tendency toward that disorder. In the past, I've been advised by my doctor that I was pre-diabetic. What other appetites do my father and I share? For excitement, for pleasure? For security and, alternately, for personal freedom?

The greatest mystery we are faced with is the mystery of ourselves. What twists and turns our lives take, what choices the stranger in the mirror makes. The people we were ten years ago hide—*where did they go?*

In 1977, my mother married Robert Jack ("Bob") Campbell. The next year, his brother Gerald shot and killed his estranged wife in a K-Mart parking lot, while their toddler son was in the shopping cart. He went to prison, but eventually escaped, and lived under an assumed name in Alabama ("Benny V. Stephens") for twenty-seven years. Before he escaped, however, he was occasionally given work release and, on one of these occasions, he visited our home.

I wrote to him a few times in prison. I know this seems bizarre, but I did not know the whole story, and my mother wanted to try to accept and forgive him. He was supposedly a Vietnam veteran who had just had a breakdown and made a terrible mistake. The little

boy visited with my stepfather's parents, once they were able to get some limited visitation rights. He had the same name as his father—they called him “Little Gerald.” So much pain all around, a bruised boy, and shame on the one who even hints at apples falling from trees.

Grandfather Allen, I intend to find you. We are who we are and, scattered among the confusion of memories is a story that, for better or for worse, belongs to us.

Big Hard Sun

In 1908, the year that Clinton and Alma Shelton were born in Oklahoma and Arkansas, respectively, a mysterious explosion known as the Tunguska event took place far away near the Podkamennaya Tunguska River in Yeniseysk Governorate, Russia. Explanations for the event generally involve a celestial body; theorists have claimed it was a meteorite, an asteroid, or a comet. Surprisingly, there was no crater. Its impact has been compared to that of a nuclear blast or a natural gas explosion. We are still talking about it and exploring its causes over a hundred years later.

The breaking apart of a family may feel like such a shock, and result in a wide path of destruction. Depending on a person's psychological or emotional standing when it hits, he or she may be differently affected. One or more persons may trigger the event and be exclusively blamed for it. Various explanations may be given in an attempt to understand why it happened. *We were happy until . . .*, people will say. In their minds, a personal Tunguska has occurred, and the damage is staggering. At times, the triggering event is a sudden death, which strips away a possible future, the way things might have been. Florence Mallory's heart attack in the middle of the street, my father's hit-and-run that resulted in the death of a woman, a death that seems to end the possibility of reconciliation.

Granny Moon had an older brother I never knew, born in 1911. His name was Barney, and he was a pig farmer in an area of Alabama known as Clouds Clove, near the town of New Hope. Clouds Cove has a history of bootleggers and various rough types who trust no one outside of their clan, and can be dangerous even today. How Barney ended up there I don't know, but he wasn't into making moonshine. He was a peaceful man and, on August 10, 1947, when he heard a couple of his rowdy neighbors fighting over ownership of a baby pig, he walked down to the scene and said, “Neighbors, please don't fight over a pig. I've got plenty of them. Come on down to the house, and just pick one out. You can have him for free. Let's just settle this and be friends.”

Unfortunately, his neighbor was not interested in a peaceful resolution. He said, “I don't want your pig,” and shot Barney in cold blood. He was never charged for this crime, as no one in law enforcement wanted to confront the man or his people, and there was no evidence against him because no witnesses would come forward.

For Barney's wife Mildred, and other family members, life forever changed. For others, like me, Barney would never exist as a real person in the flesh; instead, he would always be a story marked by tragedy, but there would be no crater.

Other losses in my life and in my family's lives have had a more immediate and crushing impact. For my mother, the death of Granny Moon was such an event. It happened in 1988. Granny was in the hospital with an enlarged heart when she vomited and asphyxiated, leaving her with permanent brain damage. I remember that my aunts and uncles gathered to decide what should happen next, whether to remove Granny from the machines that were keeping her

heart and lungs going. As the eldest son, Uncle Buddy would lead the decision.

My mother, however, seemed confused. She said to me, “What if Mama dies?” I remember being surprised by the question since it was so clear to me that she had already died in a sense; she was already gone beyond reach. For my mother, it was not yet clear. Her pain created a mental barrier to the depth and truth of her loss—to the crater it would leave. Her question was followed by an equally painful statement: “There were so many things I wanted to ask her.”

This longing to ask the questions we seek answers for, and the realization that, for some of these questions, there will never be an answer, is a continual part of grief. Even when there has been no death, a sudden separation may feel like death; the grieving process occurs in much the same way. The primary difference is that when we know a loved one is going on living somewhere without us, we carry an incomplete loss and a sense of hope for return.

What has happened may seem as great a shock as if we had just gone out to meet a neighbor in peace and gotten shot in the chest for our efforts. It may seem as if a celestial body has fallen from the sky, shattered our hearts, and left the ground all around us scorched. The first impact is jarring, and the waves that follow continue to hurt us, until at some point they are small enough that we begin to heal.

After the Tunguska event, when a Shanyagir tribe member named Chuchan was interviewed, he described the experience as being like having a second sun: everything was so incredibly bright it hurt his eyes, and the sound came in five strikes like thunder, the last of which was “small, and somewhere far away, where the Sun goes to sleep.”

Fire Insurance

Among the numerous insurance documents that I’ve found in Granny Moon’s old purse is one from Bankers Fire Insurance and Marine Company, inception July 20, 1962, expiration July 20, 1963. It covers the manufactured home she and Papa and the children lived in outside the city limits of Hazel Green, Alabama, in Madison County. “COUNTRY PROPERTY,” the paper says. The insurance was for \$5,500.

How much is a home worth anyway? A place to rest our heads, something steady and predictable, a way to get out of the rain, to gather with family and be ourselves (if we’re lucky). We ask each other sometimes, “If the house burnt down, what few items would you save at the last minute?”

I’ve thought about it a good bit myself, and I always think I’d take my photo albums and anything of my mother’s I could grab—because I have so little of hers left and I probably can’t have more at this point—and, if I had a few extra minutes, I’d take paintings and other artwork by friends and loved ones; letters; my computer with its various photographs and writings.

I’ve never had a house burn down, not while I lived there. My first home, a trailer that I bought new, with a fancy round tub, did burn after I had moved out; there was faulty electrical wiring, but by then I was removed from it by time and memory.

More personally traumatic for me was when the neighbor’s house, right next door to me when I was living on Clinton Street in Jacksonville, Alabama, burned down while I stood watching from my porch, crying into my phone, and the firefighters broke in with a battering ram. It was too late. The young mother and her baby in his crib died in that fire. The smoke

alarms weren't working. The woman died on her way down the hallway, trying to get to the baby. Her death was from smoke inhalation. To my horror, his was not; the baby was burned. There were lawsuits and changes made by the owner of these properties, including mine, who had to live with this terrible outcome.

What happens at the house next door is often beyond our control although, as I shared previously in this memoir, Dad once saved the man in the next hotel room over from burning up in his bed, when someone set his room on fire and he was passed out drunk. We do what we can.

When I was growing up, I sometimes heard people joke that spiritual salvation was the best fire insurance; we could keep ourselves out of hell, in other words. Whether there is a hell, a lake of fire, I do not know. Dante wrote of a hell that included boiling in hot oil for certain kinds of sinners, and a frozen lake for others. Robert Frost wrote that either fire or ice will work equally well to bring the world to an end. Whatever we may think of global warming, none of us wants to find ourselves so close to the sun that our wax wings melt.

Gravity

In April of 1964, Dad signed on to go work at an aircraft company in Burlington, Vermont called Lear Seigler. Lear Seigler continues in aviation and aerospace today as part of URS Corporation. Several books about the company have been written including: *They Said it Couldn't Be Done: The Incredible Story of Bill Lear*, by Victor Boeson (1970); *Stormy Genius: The Life of Aviation's Maverick, Bill Lear*, by Richard L. Rashke (1985); and *Fifty Times Around the Sun: History of Lear-Seigler*, by Gordon L. Olson (1994).

Lear is best known for his corporate jets, but he was also the inventor of the car radio and the 8-track cartridge audiotape system. He patented about 120 inventions altogether. He had a reputation as a genius and as an eccentric. From the age of twelve, he was determined to be an inventor, and he proved his worth in many ways. Regarding his successful development of the Learjet he said, "They said I'd never build it; that if I built it, it wouldn't fly; that if it flew, I couldn't sell it. Well, I did, and it did, and I could."

Here's Dad's story in his own words:

When I got to Vermont, I was supposed to go to work on Monday. I arrived on a Thursday or Friday, and I was staying in a YMCA. I didn't have anywhere else to go. I went in there and got a room, and I had a roommate, don't remember his name, but we got to talking and, like I said, it was Friday night, and I think he'd been there three or four days, and he said, "Would you like to go to a party?" He said it was out in the country, and I said, "Okay."

He had a '51 Chevrolet, and I was just indulging, drinking a lot, he was too, even though he was driving. I didn't even have a license. We found the party, out in the boondocks. It was still a little daylight then, but then it got to be night, and we were carousing, a lot of girls there, which I loved, danced a lot, and then I guess around 3 o'clock in the morning, we were both well lit at that time—

I said, "I think we oughta go home now and rest up for Monday morning." He was signed on there at the company too. I asked if he would be able to drive, and he said he was.

It was starting to rain, drizzle a little, the roads were slick. He said he knew how to get back, but it was dark, not much traffic. We were moving along there, not real fast . . . I told him not to

drive fast . . . and finally it was raining fairly hard and dark, when we came to a curve, and he lost it going into the curve, guess he got nervous, and eventually we spun around a couple of times, and hit a tree pretty hard.

My face went through the windshield on my side. The steering wheel was like a mashed-up pretzel, and him down on it, on his face. I said, "Hmm." I called his name a couple of times, but he didn't respond. I finally pulled my head out of the windshield and felt a lot of wetness, not rain, around my face. I got out of the car, crawled out, not many houses within sight. He still wasn't answering me. I felt my face, shook my head a couple or three times and said, "I've got to get help." I felt like gravity was working against me.

I found a house and just about crawled up to it, and the lady came to the door and when I said I needed help, she saw me and passed out. No help there. I saw another light, and that's about all I remember, but I managed to get to the door. Next thing I knew, I woke up in the hospital. I couldn't get any definite answers about my roommate; he may have died; I never saw him again.

I called Sylvia and told her she probably wouldn't want to see me anymore because I looked like Frankenstein. She got upset, of course, and she was going to come up there, but I told her not to. I said I would come back when I got better. In the meantime, there was a policeman trying to interview me about the wreck and everything, and he said, "Would you like to see something?" I said yeah. I was still hurting, sore, had stitches from the top of my head to the bottom lip.

We got in the car and went out to see where the wreck was, and I saw the big tree. The car had already been towed. He said, "You want to see something else?"

He took me to the other side of the road, and there was a cliff—I couldn't even see the bottom—it was a long way off of a mountain. "Good thing you hit the tree," he said. So you might say gravity was working for me after all.

I did go to that job for about a week, but I had to paint aircraft, and it involved climbing, getting up on the wings, etc., and I just couldn't do it. They had to let me go because of that. I tried, but I was too beat up.

I went back to D.C. when I was better, caught a bus, and Sylvia said I didn't look that bad, and then after we got married and everything, my face healed up pretty good, and there weren't any scars on it after a while. We got on a train going to Huntsville a few days after we got married because that's where she wanted to go.

Buddy and Oscar met us at the train station, and then drove us out to Hazel Green. Once we got the place on Beirne Avenue, I rode my bicycle to work at Brown Engineering because it was so close. At Brown, I painted mostly Bell helicopter parts.

Teledyne Brown Engineering, as it is known today, is a high-technology company that has, according to its website (<https://tbe.com/ourhistory>), "supported nearly every major U.S. space initiative, beginning with Jupiter and extending through the Space Shuttle, International Space Station, and Constellation programs." It has also been critical to the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defense system. Like Lear Seigler, it has long been in the business of defying gravity. Dad spent five years helping in that endeavor.

* * * * *



Colin James

A Few Slightly Tricky Elucidated Areas of Incompatibility

The portal to an alternative universe
has recently been identified
by a Peter Allman
of Ellesmere Port, Cheshire.

Mr. Allman was fortunate
to obtain several controversial photos
due to overcast conditions
on his cell phone before
the portal was no longer expressive.

He lists his hobbies as
trainspotting, stamp collecting,
& alternative universe enthusiast.

Memorabilia can be purchased
by contacting Mr. Allman at
his not particularly enigmatic
gypsy caravan in Anglesey, Wales.

* * *

The Rape Poem

I kept to the busy path,
connecting our village
with the town.

I thought I smelled pomegranates,
but they don't grow here as yet.

Must be cheap to import,
travelling well protected
within that red brown husk.
Juices sweet and tart.

* * *

Coiffing an Esoteric Pompadour

The *Keep Out* and *No Trespassing* signs were prominently displayed, yet as the intruders still ventured forth to witness this private landscaped Eden, sensors in the ground whispered sounds of metal sharpening metal.

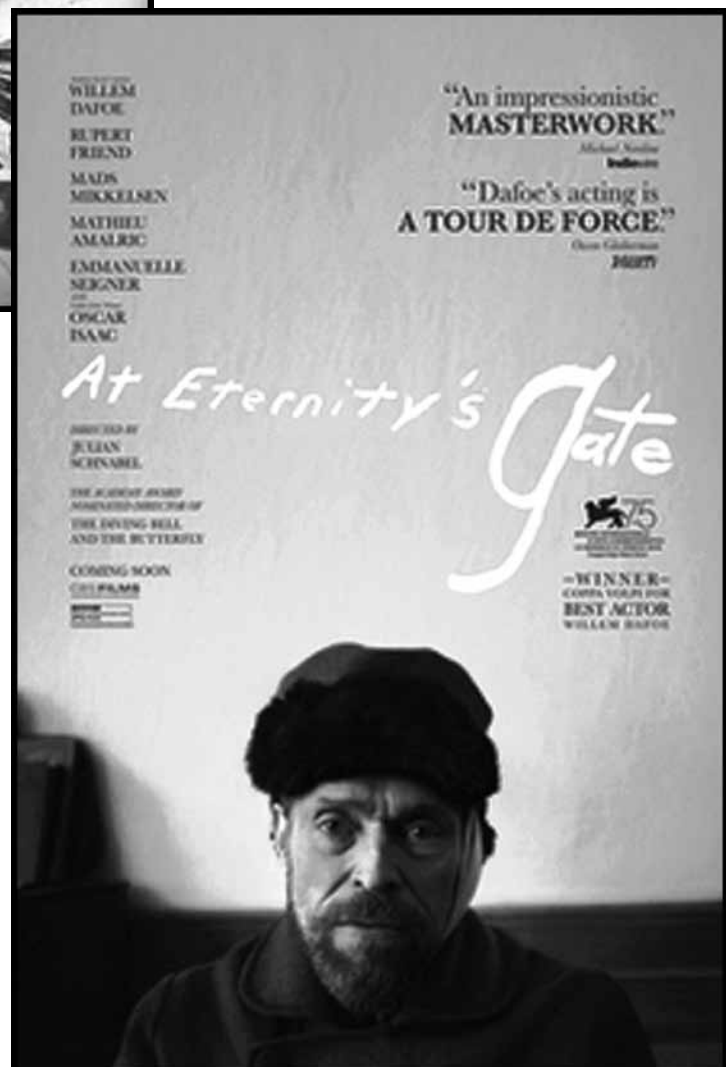
Panic was the usual result running next through a thick bordering overgrowth ripping at eyes, hair, and cloth.

In the tasteful house all was recorded, the owner sipping on chilled vermouth, then driving his Land Rover to the tourist viewing area. A mile away, according to current statutes.

He stayed almost until midnight, cursing them in an accent analogous with tax havens.

* * * * *





Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, & perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

July 10, 2019
Eastern Doughnutshop-
my table-
ZombieTown, Mass.

Not many movies in recent times have lingered with me like Bi Ghan's *Long Day's Journey Into Night* & Julian Schnabel's *At Eternity's Gate*.

The first is a 2018 Chinese art film that features about an hour filmed for 3D viewing. What's usually reserved these days for Marvel movies & other SF-fantasy blockbusters. This movie is like a hero's inner voyage, depth upon depth of sadness, desire, loss, revealing no end of the mind's path, nor fixed number of paths themselves. Kassi & I came to this film with nearly no knowledge of it, became engulfed in its world, & left deeply marked by its dark beauty.

The second is a 2018 American biopic about the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh. But rather than focus on the gossipy, malodorous parts of his life, as films about artists usually do, its star Willem Dafoe utterly possesses Van Gogh's spirit to scrawl across the screen how this genius perceived the world, & then render this perception on canvas. We walk with Van Gogh across hills & through fields of southern France to witness what drew him & why, & watch quietly as he sets about his work. And, if the film's assertion is to be believed (and it is based upon compelling evidence), Van Gogh did not die by suicide. He was killed in a profoundly stupid accident committed by long forgotten boys.

* * * * *

I currently support Senator Elizabeth Warren's (Democrat – Massachusetts) campaign for U.S. president in 2020. In a very strong field of Democratic candidates (Senator Kamala Harris, Senator Bernie Sanders, & former Vice President Joe Biden among them), Senator Warren's campaign is the most compelling. She comes from poor folks back in Oklahoma, scrabbled & lucked & hard worked her way to Harvard University, & became a senator when she saw no other avenue to fight the growing economic disparity between rich & poor in the United States.

I believe Sen. Warren is tough-as-nails ready to face Donald Trump & beat him. She will restore the rule of law & the practice of civility to the White House. Her political views are progressive, inclusive & deeply intelligent. It would be a thrill to see her elected, & thus have Donald Trump fired by his worst nightmare: an intelligent woman who beat him fair & square.





On July 5th, Kassi & I went to see the rock band Phish perform live at Fenway Park in Boston. Usually the home of baseball's Boston Red Sox, these days a few times each summer Fenway transforms into an outdoor rock venue.

I hadn't been to Fenway in 20 years or so. It was the first place I visited in Boston, from down in Connecticut where I'm from. I was 14 or so. Just remember they played the Cleveland Indians.

More importantly to me, I had not seen Phish live in two years. This was a band I went to see 20 times from 1998 to 2000, & nearly yearly since returning to live on the East Coast (they were on hiatus 2000-2002 & disbanded 2004-2008).

The first set at Fenway I enjoyed, listening to old favorites like "Free" & "Runaway Jim." But I heard nothing really new & exciting. It was sentimental enjoyment.

Then the second set, coming after night set in, exploded for me. I wasn't groping for a high; *I was carried off into it*. The songs—"Sand" > "Axilla" > "Mercury" > "Wading in the Velvet Sea" > "Fuego" > "Say It to Me S.A.N.T.O.S." > "Character Zero"—one after the next, some happily familiar to me, some wonderfully new, played with mastery, love, & complete abandon. The crowd lifted off, & the band led them on & on. It was beyond ecstasy & exhilaration.

It was an experience like none other, shared by the people in this park on this night. It's how I remembered feeling at those long-ago shows. I felt humbled & giddy, thrilled, re-invented. All sentiment was gone in my intentions. Phish played with the thrill of where they were, who danced by the thousands before them, all thens arrived to now, inevitably, happily.

Thank you, Trey, Mike, Page, & Fishman!!!!



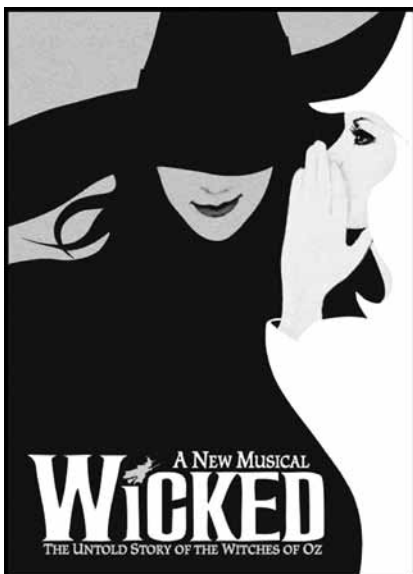
Netflix has a TV show called *The OA*, now complete through two seasons. It was created by Brit Marling and Zal Batmanglij, & stars Marling. She plays a woman whose life has cracked the border with death, with other dimensions, & she affects deeply the people she meets along the way. It is an amazing, brilliant, hallucinatory show whose only match for raw imaginal power is David Lynch & Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks*.

Marling & Batmanglij made the films *The Sound of My Voice* (2011) & *The East* (2013) before *The OA*, & each displayed their visionary genius. But, being a TV show, or a kind of long film in parts, *The OA* allows them many more moments of subtlety, space & time to slow down, build up their ideas, & then break them apart for what waits new & sparkling within.

I would recommend those enticed plan to watch this show one episode after the next, undistracted, fully awake. And twice, if possible.



I was lucky enough to see with KD & her family the musical *Wicked: The Untold Story of the Witches of Oz* at the Buell Theater in Denver, Colorado in May. A wondrous re-imagining of L. Frank Baum's 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, & Gregory Maguire's revisionist *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (published in 1995). *Wicked* is a musical, like the 1939 film version of Baum's book.



Yet, in some fundamental sense, *Wicked* is like none of these. It is kind of a prequel to the original story, much of it occurring before Dorothy Gale arrives to Oz from Kansas; yet it is also a kind of "the other's guy's version" of the original book's well-known events. Thrilling, exciting, funny, sweet, very smart.

Seeing *Wicked* reminded me of the delight I felt in reading Baum's Oz books for the first time, of seeing the 1939 film (& the little-remembered 1985 sequel *Return to Oz*). I hope the planned 2020 filmed version of this musical possesses its same deep magick.

I suppose *The Cenacle* is a kind of place I arrive to 4 times a year with my friends & writings in tact. Usually these *Notes from New England* are more singularly focused but, this time, a kind of old school “gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me.” A nice thing to do, I recall again now, & one I should do more often.

*7/10/2019
Jethro, Mass.*



Judih Haggai

discarded glasses
empty water bottles
yesterday's heat wave

* * *

out of the darkness
the call of a loon
ancestral greeting

* * *

hardly begun
day offers choices
politics or smiles

* * *

she hugs her knees
in morning position
loathe to unfold

* * *

waves of ideas
ride the sounds of morning
burps and songbirds

* * *

scent of pines
forests on Jerusalem hills
suddenly aflame

* * *

smooth wooden floors
meditators on cushions
tears of release

* * *

morning compassion
may we all live free from fear
all living creatures

* * *

thread weaves in and out
morning embroidery
each stitch counts

* * * * *



Virginia Woolf



Poetry & Its Death

(A letter to a young poet written in 1932)
[Classic Prose]

My Dear John,

Did you ever meet, or was he before your day, that old gentleman—I forget his name—who used to enliven conversation, especially at breakfast when the post came in, by saying that the art of letter-writing is dead? *The penny post*, the old gentleman used to say, *has killed the art of letter-writing*. *Nobody*, he continued, examining an envelope through his eye-glasses, *has the time even to cross their t's*. *We rush*, he went on, spreading his toast with marmalade, *to the telephone*. *We commit our half-formed thoughts in ungrammatical phrases to the post card*. *Gray is dead*, he continued; *Horace Walpole is dead*; *Madame de Sévigné*—she is dead too, I suppose he was about to add, but a fit of choking cut him short, and he had to leave the room before he had time to condemn all the arts, as his pleasure was, to the cemetery. But when the post came in this morning and I opened your letter stuffed with little blue sheets written all over in a cramped but not illegible hand—I regret to say, however, that several t's were uncrossed and the grammar of one sentence seems to me dubious—I replied after all these years to that elderly necrophilist—*Nonsense*. The art of letter-writing has only just come into existence. It is the child of the penny post. And there is some truth in that remark, I think. Naturally when a letter cost half a crown to send, it had to prove itself a document of some importance; it was read aloud; it was tied up with green silk; after a certain number of years it was published for the infinite delectation of posterity. But your letter, on the contrary, will have to be burnt. It only cost three-halfpence to send. Therefore you could afford to be intimate, irreticent, indiscreet in the extreme. What you tell me about poor dear C. and his adventure on the Channel boat is deadly private; your ribald jests at the expense of M. would certainly ruin your friendship if they got about; I doubt, too, that posterity, unless it is much quicker in the wit than I expect, could follow the line of your thought from the roof which leaks (“splash, splash, splash into the soap dish”) past Mrs. Gape, the charwoman, whose retort to the greengrocer gives me the keenest pleasure, via Miss Curtis and her odd confidence on the steps of the omnibus; to Siamese cats (“Wrap their noses in an old stocking my Aunt says if they howl”); so to the value of criticism to a writer; so to Donne; so to Gerard Hopkins; so to tombstones; so to gold-fish; and so with a sudden alarming swoop to “Do write and tell me where poetry’s going, or if it’s dead?” No, your letter, because it is a true letter—one that can neither be read aloud now, nor printed in time to come—will have to be burnt. Posterity must live upon Walpole and Madame de Sévigné. The great age of letter-writing, which is, of course, the present, will leave no letters behind it. And in making my reply there is only one question that I can answer or attempt to answer in public; about poetry and its death.

But before I begin, I must own up to those defects, both natural and acquired, which, as you will find, distort and invalidate all that I have to say about poetry. The lack of a sound university training has always made it impossible for me to distinguish between an iambic and a dactyl, and if this were not enough to condemn one for ever, the practice of prose has bred in me, as in most prose writers, a foolish jealousy, a righteous indignation—anyhow, an emotion which the critic should be without. For how, we despised prose writers ask when we get together, could one say what one meant and observe the rules of poetry? Conceive dragging in “blade” because one had mentioned “maid”; and

pairing “sorrow” with “borrow”? Rhyme is not only childish, but dishonest, we prose writers say. Then we go on to say, And look at their rules! How easy to be a poet! How straight the path is for them, and how strict! *This you must do; this you must not. I would rather be a child and walk in a crocodile down a suburban path than write poetry*, I have heard prose writers say. *It must be like taking the veil and entering a religious order—observing the rites and rigours of metre*. That explains why they repeat the same thing over and over again. Whereas we prose writers (I am only telling you the sort of nonsense prose writers talk when they are alone) are masters of language, not its slaves; nobody can teach us; nobody can coerce us; we say what we mean; we have the whole of life for our province. We are the creators, we are the explorers. . . . So we run on—nonsensically enough, I must admit.

Now that I have made a clean breast of these deficiencies, let us proceed. From certain phrases in your letter I gather that you think that poetry is in a parlous way, and that your case as a poet in this particular autumn of 1931 is a great deal harder than Shakespeare’s, Dryden’s, Pope’s, or Tennyson’s. In fact it is the hardest case that has ever been known. Here you give me an opening, which I am prompt to seize, for a little lecture. Never think yourself singular, never think your own case much harder than other people’s. I admit that the age we live in makes this difficult. For the first time in history there are readers—a large body of people, occupied in business, in sport, in nursing their grandfathers, in tying up parcels behind counters—they all read now; and they want to be told how to read and what to read; and their teachers—the reviewers, the lecturers, the broadcasters—must in all humanity make reading easy for them; assure them that literature is violent and exciting, full of heroes and villains; of hostile forces perpetually in conflict; of fields strewn with bones; of solitary victors riding off on white horses wrapped in black cloaks to meet their death at the turn of the road. A pistol shot rings out. “The age of romance was over. The age of realism had begun”—you know the sort of thing. Now of course writers themselves know very well that there is not a word of truth in all this—there are no battles, and no murders and no defeats and no victories. But as it is of the utmost importance that readers should be amused, writers acquiesce. They dress themselves up. They act their parts. One leads; the other follows. One is romantic, the other realist. One is advanced, the other out of date. There is no harm in it, so long as you take it as a joke, but once you believe in it, once you begin to take yourself seriously as a leader or as a follower, as a modern or as a conservative, then you become a self-conscious, biting, and scratching little animal whose work is not of the slightest value or importance to anybody. Think of yourself rather as something much humbler and less spectacular, but to my mind, far more interesting—a poet in whom live all the poets of the past, from whom all poets in time to come will spring. You have a touch of Chaucer in you, and something of Shakespeare; Dryden, Pope, Tennyson—to mention only the respectable among your ancestors—stir in your blood and sometimes move your pen a little to the right or to the left. In short, you are an immensely ancient, complex, and continuous character, for which reason please treat yourself with respect and think twice before you dress up as Guy Fawkes and spring out upon timid old ladies at street corners, threatening death and demanding twopence-halfpenny.

However, as you say that you are in a fix (“it has never been so hard to write poetry as it is to-day and that poetry may be, you think, at its last gasp in England, the novelists are doing all the interesting things now”), let me while away the time before the post goes in imagining your state and in hazarding one or two guesses which, since this is a letter, need not be taken too seriously or pressed too far. Let me try to put myself in your place; let me try to imagine, with your letter to help me, what it feels like to be a young poet in the autumn of 1931. (And taking my own advice, I shall treat you not as one poet in particular, but as several poets in one.) On the floor of your mind, then—is it not this that makes you a poet?—rhythm keeps up its perpetual beat. Sometimes it seems to die down to nothing; it lets you eat, sleep, talk like other people. Then again it swells and rises and attempts to sweep all the contents of your mind into one dominant dance. To-night is such an occasion. Although you are alone, and have taken one boot off and are about to undo the other, you cannot go on with the process of undressing, but must instantly write at the bidding of the dance. You snatch pen and paper; you hardly trouble to hold the one or to straighten the other. And while you write, while the

first stanzas of the dance are being fastened down, I will withdraw a little and look out of the window. A woman passes, then a man; a car glides to a stop and then—but there is no need to say what I see out of the window, nor indeed is there time, for I am suddenly recalled from my observations by a cry of rage or despair. Your page is crumpled in a ball; your pen sticks upright by the nib in the carpet. If there were a cat to swing or a wife to murder now would be the time. So at least I infer from the ferocity of your expression. You are rasped, jarred, thoroughly out of temper. And if I am to guess the reason, it is, I should say, that the rhythm which was opening and shutting with a force that sent shocks of excitement from your head to your heels has encountered some hard and hostile object upon which it has smashed itself to pieces. Something has worked in which cannot be made into poetry; some foreign body, angular, sharp-edged, gritty, has refused to join in the dance. Obviously, suspicion attaches to Mrs. Gape; she has asked you to make a poem of her; then to Miss Curtis and her confidences on the omnibus; then to C., who has infected you with a wish to tell his story—and a very amusing one it was—in verse. But for some reason you cannot do their bidding. Chaucer could; Shakespeare could; so could Crabbe, Byron, and perhaps Robert Browning. But it is October 1931, and for a long time now poetry has shirked contact with—what shall we call it?—Shall we shortly and no doubt inaccurately call it life? And will you come to my help by guessing what I mean? Well then, it has left all that to the novelist. Here you see how easy it would be for me to write two or three volumes in honour of prose and in mockery of verse; to say how wide and ample is the domain of the one, how starved and stunted the little grove of the other. But it would be simpler and perhaps fairer to check these theories by opening one of the thin books of modern verse that lie on your table. I open and I find myself instantly confused. Here are the common objects of daily prose—the bicycle and the omnibus. Obviously the poet is making his muse face facts. Listen:

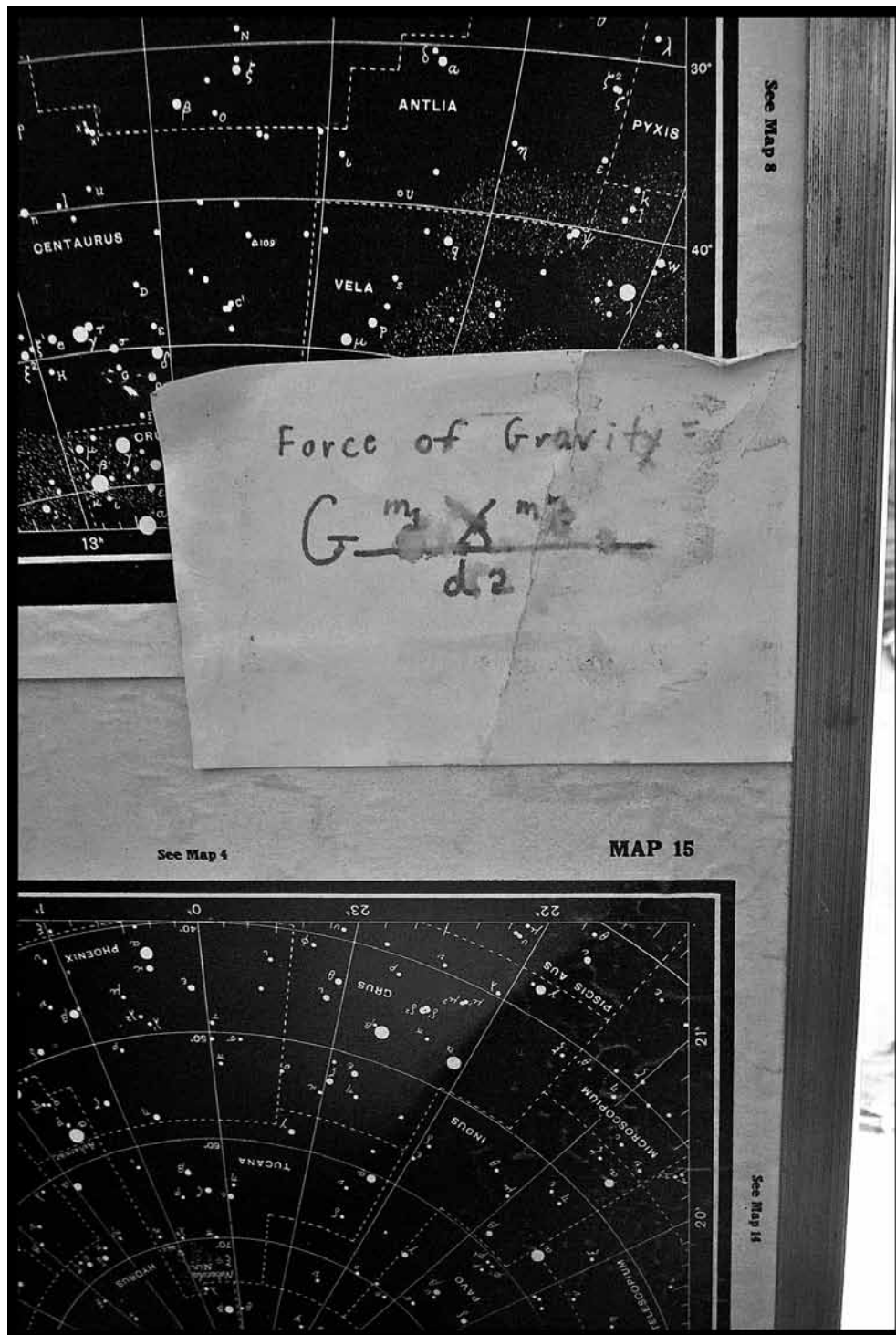
*Which of you waking early and watching daybreak
Will not hasten in heart, handsome, aware of wonder
At light unleashed, advancing; a leader of movement,
Breaking like surf on turf on road and roof,
Or chasing shadow on downs like whippet racing,
The stilled stone, halting at eyelash barrier,
Enforcing in face a profile, marks of misuse,
Beating impatient and importunate on boudoir shutters
Where the old life is not up yet, with rays
Exploring through rotting floor a dismantled mill—
The old life never to be born again?*

Yes, but how will he get through with it? I read on and find:

*Whistling as he shuts
His door behind him, travelling to work by tube
Or walking to the park to it to ease the bowels,*

and read on and find again:

*As a boy lately come up from country to town
Returns for the day to his village in EXPENSIVE SHOES—*



and so on again to:

*Seeking a heaven on earth he chases his shadow,
Loses his capital and his nerve in pursuing
What yachtsmen, explorers, climbers and BUGGERS ARE AFTER.*

These lines and the words I have emphasized are enough to confirm me in part of my guess at least. The poet is trying to include Mrs. Gape. He is honestly of opinion that she can be brought into poetry and will do very well there. Poetry, he feels, will be improved by the actual, the colloquial. But though I honour him for the attempt, I doubt that it is wholly successful. I feel a jar. I feel a shock. I feel as if I had stubbed my toe on the corner of the wardrobe. *Am I then*, I go on to ask, *shocked, prudishly and conventionally, by the words themselves?* I think not. The shock is literally a shock. The poet as I guess has strained himself to include an emotion that is not domesticated and acclimatized to poetry; the effort has thrown him off his balance; he rights himself, as I am sure I shall find if I turn the page, by a violent recourse to the poetical—he invokes the moon or the nightingale. Anyhow, the transition is sharp. The poem is cracked in the middle. Look, it comes apart in my hands: here is reality on one side, here is beauty on the other; and instead of acquiring a whole object rounded and entire, I am left with broken parts in my hands which, since my reason has been roused and my imagination has not been allowed to take entire possession of me, I contemplate coldly, critically, and with distaste.

Such at least is the hasty analysis I make of my own sensations as a reader; but again I am interrupted. I see that you have overcome your difficulty, whatever it was; the pen is once more in action, and having torn up the first poem you are at work upon another. Now then if I want to understand your state of mind I must invent another explanation to account for this return of fluency. You have dismissed, as I suppose, all sorts of things that would come naturally to your pen if you had been writing prose—the charwoman, the omnibus, the incident on the Channel boat. Your range is restricted—I judge from your expression—concentrated and intensified. I hazard a guess that you are thinking now, not about things in general, but about yourself in particular. There is a fixity, a gloom, yet an inner glow that seem to hint that you are looking within and not without. But in order to consolidate these flimsy guesses about the meaning of an expression on a face, let me open another of the books on your table and check it by what I find there. Again I open at random and read this:

*To penetrate that room is my desire,
The extreme attic of the mind, that lies
Just beyond the last bend in the corridor.
Writing I do it. Phrases, poems are keys.
Loving's another way (but not so sure).
A fire's in there, I think, there's truth at last
Deep in a lumber chest. Sometimes I'm near,
But draughts puff out the matches, and I'm lost.
Sometimes I'm lucky, find a key to turn,
Open an inch or two—but always then
A bell rings, someone calls, or cries of "fire"
Arrest my hand when nothing's known or seen,
And running down the stairs again I mourn.*

and then this:

*There is a dark room,
The locked and shuttered womb,
Where negative's made positive.
Another dark room,
The blind and bolted tomb,
Where positives change to negative.
We may not undo that or escape this, who
Have birth and death coiled in our bones,
Nothing we can do
Will sweeten the real rue,
That we begin, and end, with groans.*

And then this:

*Never being, but always at the edge of Being
My head, like Death mask, is brought into the Sun.
The shadow pointing finger across cheek,
I move lips for tasting, I move hands for touching,
But never am nearer than touching,
Though the spirit leans outward for seeing.
Observing rose, gold, eyes, an admired landscape,
My senses record the act of wishing
Wishing to be
Rose, gold, landscape or another—
Claiming fulfilment in the act of loving.*

Since these quotations are chosen at random and I have yet found three different poets writing about nothing, if not about the poet himself, I hold that the chances are that you too are engaged in the same occupation. I conclude that self offers no impediment; self joins in the dance; self lends itself to the rhythm; it is apparently easier to write a poem about oneself than about any other subject. But what does one mean by “oneself”? Not the self that Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelley have described—not the self that loves a woman, or that hates a tyrant, or that broods over the mystery of the world. No, the self that you are engaged in describing is shut out from all that. It is a self that sits alone in the room at night with the blinds drawn. In other words the poet is much less interested in what we have in common than in what he has apart. Hence I suppose the extreme difficulty of these poems—and I have to confess that it would floor me completely to say from one reading or even from two or three what these poems mean. The poet is trying honestly and exactly to describe a world that has perhaps no existence except for one particular person at one particular moment. And the more sincere he is in keeping to the precise outline of the roses and cabbages of his private universe, the more he puzzles us who have agreed in a lazy spirit of compromise to see roses and cabbages as they are seen, more or less, by the twenty-six passengers on the outside of an omnibus. He strains to describe; we strain to see; he flickers his torch; we catch a flying gleam. It is exciting; it is stimulating; but is that a tree, we ask, or is it perhaps an old woman tying up her shoe in the gutter?

Well, then, if there is any truth in what I am saying—if, that is, you cannot write about the actual, the colloquial, Mrs. Gape or the Channel boat or Miss Curtis on the omnibus, without straining the machine of poetry; if, therefore, you are driven to contemplate landscapes and emotions within and must render visible to the world at large what you alone can see, then indeed yours is a hard case, and

poetry, though still breathing—witness these little books—is drawing her breath in short, sharp gasps. Still, consider the symptoms. They are not the symptoms of death in the least. Death in literature, and I need not tell you how often literature has died in this country or in that, comes gracefully, smoothly, quietly. Lines slip easily down the accustomed grooves. The old designs are copied so glibly that we are half inclined to think them original, save for that very glibness. But here the very opposite is happening: here in my first quotation the poet breaks his machine because he will clog it with raw fact. In my second, he is unintelligible because of his desperate determination to tell the truth about himself. Thus I cannot help thinking that though you may be right in talking of the difficulty of the time, you are wrong to despair.

Is there not, alas, good reason to hope? I say “alas” because then I must give my reasons, which are bound to be foolish and certain also to cause pain to the large and highly respectable society of necrophils—Mr. Peabody, and his like—who much prefer death to life and are even now intoning the sacred and comfortable words, *Keats is dead, Shelley is dead, Byron is dead*. But it is late: necrophily induces slumber; the old gentlemen have fallen asleep over their classics, and if what I am about to say takes a sanguine tone—and for my part I do not believe in poets dying; Keats, Shelley, Byron are alive here in this room in you and you and you—I can take comfort from the thought that my hoping will not disturb their snoring. So to continue—why should not poetry, now that it has so honestly scraped itself free from certain falsities, the wreckage of the great Victorian age, now that it has so sincerely gone down into the mind of the poet and verified its outlines—a work of renovation that has to be done from time to time and was certainly needed, for bad poetry is almost always the result of forgetting oneself—all becomes distorted and impure if you lose sight of that central reality—now, I say, that poetry has done all this, why should it not once more open its eyes, look out of the window and write about other people? Two or three hundred years ago you were always writing about other people. Your pages were crammed with characters of the most opposite and various kinds—Hamlet, Cleopatra, Falstaff. Not only did we go to you for drama, and for the subtleties of human character, but we also went to you, incredible though this now seems, for laughter. You made us roar with laughter. Then later, not more than a hundred years ago, you were lashing our follies, trouncing our hypocrisies, and dashing off the most brilliant of satires. You were Byron, remember; you wrote *Don Juan*. You were Crabbe also; you took the most sordid details of the lives of peasants for your theme. Clearly therefore you have it in you to deal with a vast variety of subjects; it is only a temporary necessity that has shut you up in one room, alone, by yourself.

But how are you going to get out, into the world of other people? That is your problem now, if I may hazard a guess—to find the right relationship, now that you know yourself, between the self that you know and the world outside. It is a difficult problem. No living poet has, I think, altogether solved it. And there are a thousand voices prophesying despair. Science, they say, has made poetry impossible; there is no poetry in motor cars and wireless. And we have no religion. All is tumultuous and transitional. Therefore, so people say, there can be no relation between the poet and the present age. But surely that is nonsense. These accidents are superficial; they do not go nearly deep enough to destroy the most profound and primitive of instincts, the instinct of rhythm. All you need now is to stand at the window and let your rhythmical sense open and shut, open and shut, boldly and freely, until one thing melts in another, until the taxis are dancing with the daffodils, until a whole has been made from all these separate fragments. I am talking nonsense, I know. What I mean is, summon all your courage, exert all your vigilance, invoke all the gifts that Nature has been induced to bestow. Then let your rhythmical sense wind itself in and out among men and women, omnibuses, sparrows—whatever come along the street—until it has strung them together in one harmonious whole. That perhaps is your task—to find the relation between things that seem incompatible yet have a mysterious affinity, to absorb every experience that comes your way fearlessly and saturate it completely so that your poem is a whole, not a fragment; to re-think human life into poetry and so give us tragedy again and comedy by means of characters not spun out at length in the novelist’s way, but condensed and synthesised in the

poet's way—that is what we look to you to do now. But as I do not know what I mean by rhythm nor what I mean by life, and as most certainly I cannot tell you which objects can properly be combined together in a poem—that is entirely your affair—and as I cannot tell a dactyl from an iambic, and am therefore unable to say how you must modify and expand the rites and ceremonies of your ancient and mysterious art—I will move on to safer ground and turn again to these little books themselves.

When, then, I return to them I am, as I have admitted, filled, not with forebodings of death, but with hopes for the future. But one does not always want to be thinking of the future, if, as sometimes happens, one is living in the present. When I read these poems, now, at the present moment, I find myself—reading, you know, is rather like opening the door to a horde of rebels who swarm out attacking one in twenty places at once—hit, roused, scraped, bared, swung through the air, so that life seems to flash by; then again blinded, knocked on the head—all of which are agreeable sensations for a reader (since nothing is more dismal than to open the door and get no response), and all I believe certain proof that this poet is alive and kicking. And yet mingling with these cries of delight, of jubilation, I record also, as I read, the repetition in the bass of one word intoned over and over again by some malcontent. At last then, silencing the others, I say to this malcontent, “Well, and what do YOU want?” Whereupon he bursts out, rather to my discomfort, “Beauty.” Let me repeat, I take no responsibility for what my senses say when I read; I merely record the fact that there is a malcontent in me who complains that it seems to him odd, considering that English is a mixed language, a rich language; a language unmatched for its sound and colour, for its power of imagery and suggestion—it seems to him odd that these modern poets should write as if they had neither ears nor eyes, neither soles to their feet nor palms to their hands, but only honest enterprising book-fed brains, uni-sexual bodies and—but here I interrupted him. For when it comes to saying that a poet should be bisexual, and that I think is what he was about to say, even I, who have had no scientific training whatsoever, draw the line and tell that voice to be silent.

But how far, if we discount these obvious absurdities, do you think there is truth in this complaint? For my own part now that I have stopped reading, and can see the poems more or less as a whole, I think it is true that the eye and ear are starved of their rights. There is no sense of riches held in reserve behind the admirable exactitude of the lines I have quoted, as there is, for example, behind the exactitude of Mr. Yeats. The poet clings to his one word, his only word, as a drowning man to a spar. And if this is so, I am ready to hazard a reason for it all the more readily because I think it bears out what I have just been saying. The art of writing, and that is perhaps what my malcontent means by “beauty,” the art of having at one's beck and call every word in the language, of knowing their weights, colours, sounds, associations, and thus making them, as is so necessary in English, suggest more than they can state, can be learnt of course to some extent by reading—it is impossible to read too much; but much more drastically and effectively by imagining that one is not oneself but somebody different. How can you learn to write if you write only about one single person? To take the obvious example. Can you doubt that the reason why Shakespeare knew every sound and syllable in the language and could do precisely what he liked with grammar and syntax, was that Hamlet, Falstaff and Cleopatra rushed him into this knowledge; that the lords, officers, dependants, murderers and common soldiers of the plays insisted that he should say exactly what they felt in the words expressing their feelings? It was they who taught him to write, not the begetter of the Sonnets. So that if you want to satisfy all those senses that rise in a swarm whenever we drop a poem among them—the reason, the imagination, the eyes, the ears, the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet, not to mention a million more that the psychologists have yet to name, you will do well to embark upon a long poem in which people as unlike yourself as possible talk at the tops of their voices. And for heaven's sake, publish nothing before you are thirty.

That, I am sure, is of very great importance. Most of the faults in the poems I have been reading can be explained, I think, by the fact that they have been exposed to the fierce light of publicity while they were still too young to stand the strain. It has shrivelled them into a skeleton austerity, both emotional and verbal, which should not be characteristic of youth. The poet writes very well; he writes

for the eye of a severe and intelligent public; but how much better he would have written if for ten years he had written for no eye but his own! After all, the years from twenty to thirty are years (let me refer to your letter again) of emotional excitement. The rain dripping, a wing flashing, someone passing—the commonest sounds and sights have power to fling one, as I seem to remember, from the heights of rapture to the depths of despair. And if the actual life is thus extreme, the visionary life should be free to follow. Write then, now that you are young, nonsense by the ream. Be silly, be sentimental, imitate Shelley, imitate Samuel Smiles; give the rein to every impulse; commit every fault of style, grammar, taste, and syntax; pour out; tumble over; loose anger, love, satire, in whatever words you can catch, coerce or create, in whatever metre, prose, poetry, or gibberish that comes to hand. Thus you will learn to write. But if you publish, your freedom will be checked; you will be thinking what people will say; you will write for others when you ought only to be writing for yourself. And what point can there be in curbing the wild torrent of spontaneous nonsense which is now, for a few years only, your divine gift in order to publish prim little books of experimental verses? To make money? That, we both know, is out of the question. To get criticism? But you friends will pepper your manuscripts with far more serious and searching criticism than any you will get from the reviewers. As for fame, look, I implore you at famous people; see how the waters of dullness spread around them as they enter; observe their pomposity, their prophetic airs; reflect that the greatest poets were anonymous; think how Shakespeare cared nothing for fame; how Donne tossed his poems into the waste-paper basket; write an essay giving a single instance of any modern English writer who has survived the disciples and the admirers, the autograph hunters and the interviewers, the dinners and the luncheons, the celebrations and the commemorations with which English society so effectively stops the mouths of its singers and silences their songs.

But enough. I, at any rate, refuse to be necrophilus. So long as you and you and you, venerable and ancient representatives of Sappho, Shakespeare, and Shelley are aged precisely twenty-three and propose—*O enviable lot!*—to spend the next fifty years of your lives in writing poetry, I refuse to think that the art is dead. And if ever the temptation to necrophilize comes over you, be warned by the fate of that old gentleman whose name I forget, but I think that it was Peabody. In the very act of consigning all the arts to the grave, he choked over a large piece of hot buttered toast, and the consolation then offered him that he was about to join the elder Pliny in the shades gave him, I am told, no sort of satisfaction whatsoever.

And now for the intimate, the indiscreet, and indeed, the only really interesting parts of this letter . . .

* * * * *





Ace Boggess

“How Far Would You Go To Stop That Crazy Craving?”

—read at 6 a.m. on the back of a Honeycombs cereal box

When breakfast cereal
makes me think of sex:
as though at dawn
I awoke from lotus sleep
with arms bound to a sea-sprayed bench,
eyes honeyed after dreaming lust
in incandescent shades,
scents of lilac, butter rum, &
freshly broiled cinnamon
raving deep
in the imaginations of young men,
I know I have been gone too many days.

* * *

What Kind of Plastic Surgery Would I Ask for My Soul?

First the scars. Mostly the scars.
Streaks of white & red across the Invisible.

With precision tools,
somewhere between laser scalpel &
deus ex machina,
I'd have them cut away,
erased, replaced with tattoos
of circus clowns,
or a prairie fire,
that wipes the landscape clean.

Nip here, tuck there,
injections to brighten &
clarify. Or, maybe I
should enhance instead,
add some needed character
to that unseen part of me.

I could make new scars
that swear ugliness is beautiful,
could cloak myself in them,
from thought to DNA,
until I leave my chrysalis,
a man made up of only scars:
pastiche, collage,
a burned omelet of scars.

Otherwise, nothing further
need be done.

* * *

What Could Be More Wonderful?

29th birthday: 10/08/00

If I knew an honest answer
I would not be hidden in the dirty
swollen sack of my room

If I gazed into mirrored sprites of jade-gray eyes
long enough to note the virid universe
I might swear on silver lens I shall do this
sing this
pray/steal/fuck/swallow this or this
until I have conquered the term *serenity*

If hearing leaky faucet sounds of pulse at two a.m.
or countless I-love-yous promised day & night
I sighed
instead of so much yearning
I might apprehend the silence

If in the absence of fear
in stillness from a life's routines
I were to sleep &
sleeping dream &
dreaming turn page after page
to volume's end &
if on waking notes endured
with time for recollection

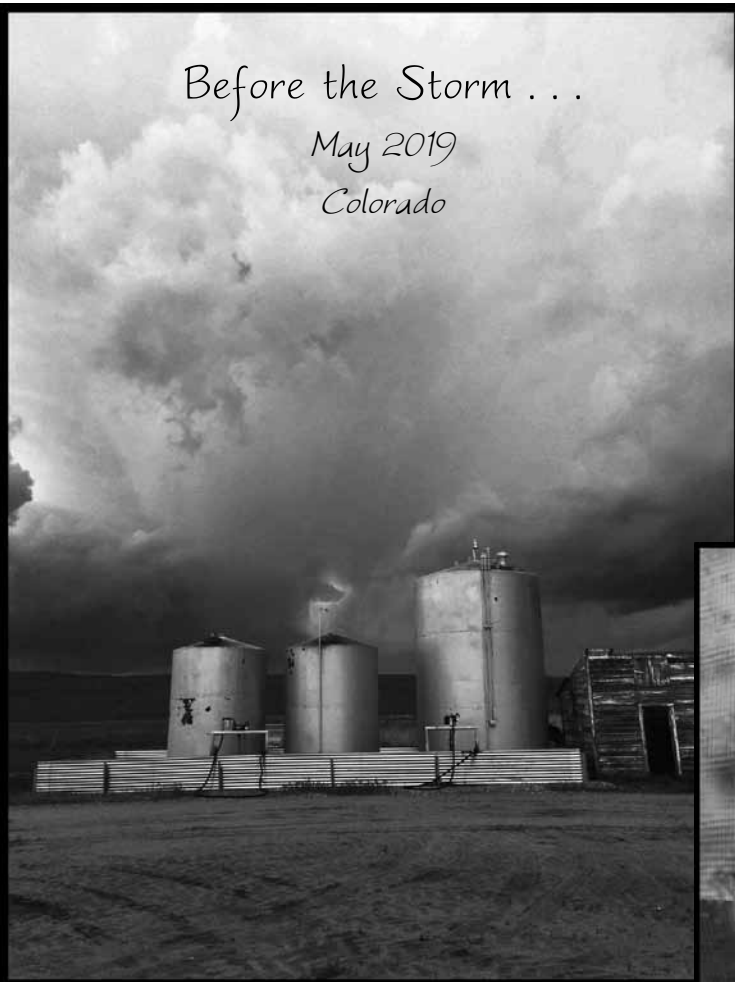
I would put aside all need
to write
this dissertation
on the flaws.

* * * * *

Before the Storm . . .

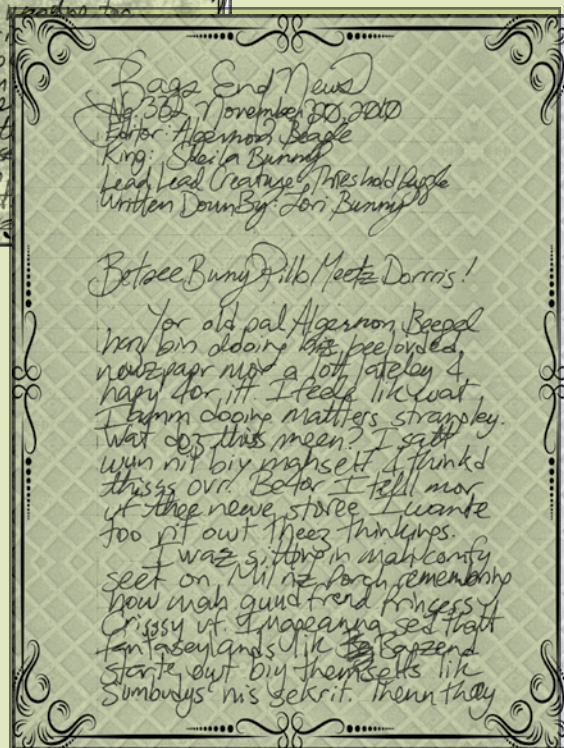
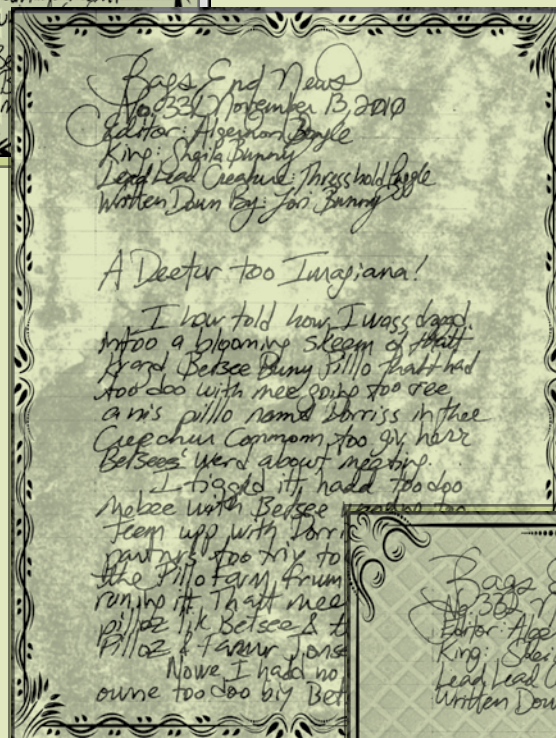
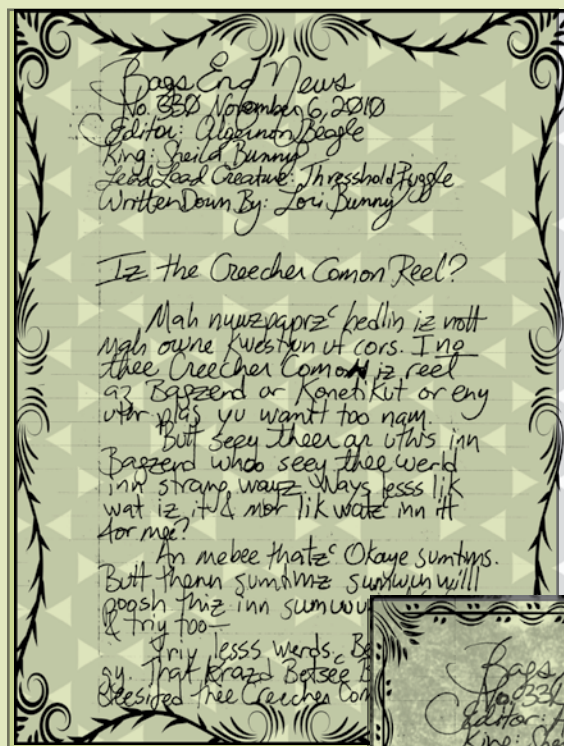
May 2019

Colorado



... & After







Bags End Book #13: The Great Pillow Summit!

This story and more Bags End writings
can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/bags-end.pdf>

Hello Cenacle readers,

Mah name is Algernon Beagle & I am the editor guy for Bags End News. Bags End News is a newspaper about mah homeland, a fantasyland called Bags End.

From the outside, Bags End looks like 3 brown-colored laundry bags piled up on a little chair in the corner of our friend Miss Chris's bedroom in Connecticut. Miss Chris is 5 years old & has a toy tall boy brother named Ramie, who is 17.

Inside, Bags End is sort of like an apartment building of levels but, cuz it is a fantasyland, nobody knows about its top or bottom. Most levels look like regular hallways, with doors to rooms & other places running up & down their lengths.

Each level is connected to the one above & the one below by ramps that are good for folks with legs & others without. Strangely, the other end of each level ends in a sudden edge, so be warned, should you come to visit.

The Cenacle editor guy, who is a cousin to my friend & Miss Chris's brother Ramie, invited me to share some of the stories from mah newspaper, now & again. He also helped with the typing & some of the spellings, to make this book presentable here. I love English but I still don't spell it too great.

Anyway, I hope you enjoy these stories from Bags End, a place near & dear to mah heartbone.

Is the Creature Common Real?

This chapter's title is not mah own question of course. I know the Creature Common is real as Bags End or Connecticut or any other place you want to name.

But see there are others in Bags End who see the world in strange ways. Ways less like "what is it?" & more like "what's in it 4or me?"

And maybe that's OK sometimes. But then sometimes someone will push this idear in someone else's face & try to--

Try less words, Beagle.

OK, guy. Here goes. That crazed Betsy Bunny Pillow decided the Creature Common wasn't real.

Now some may ask why would Betsy care about the Creature Common? Well, the tragical answer to that, Dear Readers, is that I mentioned a pillow

I met named Doris.

There are times when Betsy is just too busy to notice she has not smothered me yet. She is usually seeing to her business in the Bunny Pillow Free State. Since Farmer Jones is helping Pillows to grow there again, & not an enemy like the old days, when he would sell them to rich people, Betsy concerned herself more with consolidating her own power base, or lead guitar or something.

In Beagle short, Betsy wants to run the show again. She takes all this agreeable cooperating personally, like an insult.

Anyway, all this began as me trying to do something nice. You see, some shadowy Allies of Betsy's came to me & said Betsy wasn't her usual self.

"That's good news then," sayeth me, a bit meanly.

"Algernon, she's depressed."

"She's a big stupid Pillow! She attacks nice little guys like mah friends the Weedz, & tries to smother nozebones like mine!"

Well, I guess the Allies used some kind of hip-knows-is on me cuz I found myself going of mah own will to Betsy's Secret Clubhouse to ask her if we could continue writing her autobiography. It should be called The Tallest Tales of All.

Her Clubhouse is through one of the doors in Bags End, & is in a tree in the middle of a big field. I guess she knew I was coming because when I got there I was led right through all the fences & booby traps & whatever to her headquarters. There she was, wearing her crazy little spectacles on her no-face, & holding a bunch of papers in her no-hands.

"Ahh, Beagle, not even so late this time," she whispered in her own weird way of friendly.

She started in right away, crazier than ever. She has these idears about the Evolution of Pillows. It think it was supposed to be a story with her as the best part at the end.

It would have been fine since I take very slow notes, & Betsy does not talk slow, & I was getting sleepy like I didn't care, & I guess that could have been trouble really but then Betsy said something about knowing what Pillows really want, & I said, by mistake, half-napping out loud, "I bet you didn't ask Doris."

Betsy stopped cold & I woke up fast.

"Who?"

"Um, nobody."

Suddenly Betsy had me pressed up against the wall & talking. "Are you claiming there is a Pillow I don't know?"

"Yes. I mean no! Let me be, ya crazed Pillow!"

Finally I gave up & said, "OK, she is a nice Pillow I know who lives in the Creature Common which you never went to, so you don't know her!" Then I wiggled away from her. And I runned & runned.

But ya know it comes down to this, Dear Readers: stubborn is stubborn but crazed stubborn is stubborn by far. Plus, Betsy has some very loyal Allies who are also strangely nice to me.

Again I found mahself going to see that nutty Pillow. Her Allies had assured me she only wanted to talk, or whisper really, but promised no smothering. I felt not reassured.

"Now, Beagle," Betsy said instead of hello, "You claim to know a Pillow I do not."

"I don't claim nothing, ya dum Pillow. I know Doris & I like her way more than you." I guess I figgered mah end was really ni, & I better get all mah best last words in.

Betsy talked on like I had not talked. She does that a lot. "I wonder how you know this alleged Pillow."

"She lives in the Creature Common with mah friend Larry the Spyder & a lot of other nice fellas," I explained, like Betsy would nod & listen & ask more interested questions.

Betsy nodded, but not like she listened. "I wonder why you would claim to know Pillows I do not." Her whispery voice was taking on that pre-smothering tone I know & fear too well.

"Now, Betsy, you promised no funny smothering business," I said, wondering how it was that Betsy always managed to block mah escape routes. She is very smart 4or a crazed Pillow.

"Clearly there are some who support me as well as my well-known enemies," & now it seemed like she was rubbing her chin, which she had none, with her fingers, & she got none of them too, thinking about mah usefulness to her coming scheme.

I guess even a cornered Beagle can take so much. "Betsy, she is real & she don't live on your Farm. She has, um, Partners, like you have Allies, but I don't think none of them know about any of this stuff."

Now she was impatient again.

"Where is this Common? Can you lead me there now? At threat of your pending demise?"

Well, Dear Readers, at threat of mah pending demise I can do a whole lot, mah skills just bloom. But . . .

"I get there through Dreams usually."

"Dreams?"

"Yes, yes! Dreams! Like on the other side of them. That's how it works. I didn't make up the way. I like doors better like in Bags End, but what can I say?" I was upset & talking fast & who knows maybe Betsy saw I am not subtle enough to just keep making stuff up at the threat of mah pending demise.

She nodded with her no-head.

"Tell her we have business. Pillow to Pillow business."

"But--"

"Now go!"

"But--"

"I said GO!"

So I runned & runned & I guess I found mahself nozebone deep in a nutty new story.

But the funny thing is that I felt . . . OK.

I mean, here I am, doing what I do. In danger, unsure, telling the story straight & true as I can. OK.

A Detour to Imagianna!

So now I was caught up in Betsy Bunny Pillow's blooming scheme of me going to see that nice Pillow named Doris in the Creature Common to give her Betsy's word about meeting.

I figgered it had to do maybe with Betsy wanting to team up with Doris & her Partners to try to take back the Bunny Pillow Farm from the Collective running it, including the Face Pillows she don't like, & of course her old enemy Farmer Jones.

Now I had no plan of mah own to do by Betsy's commands one bit. But I

had to figger things better than I had so far.

So I went pronto to the right door in Bags End to see mah good friend Princess Crisakah of Imagianna, who is Guardian of Bags End & other places too.

I found Crissy near her castle in Imagianna, under our favorite oak tree, looking at the sky most interestedly. She stopped long enough to hug me but good, & then we both looked.

Sometimes looking with a friend is full of words & sometimes not. This was not. Then after awhile I talked.

"Crissy, what do you know about the Creature Common?"

"It's far from here," she said, & I found that strange.

"Did you ever go there?"

"Not yet. You're the first one," she smiled.

"To go there?"

She nodded. "Fantasylands don't start off connected to the others. They start off private. Like a new secret."

Well. Hmm. O. "So nobody knowed it be4ore me?"

"I don't think so."

"And now Betsy wants to go there & cause trouble!" I cried out. I was suddenly very sad & sort of angry too.

Crissy hugged me. "I have not been there yet but I do know there are some good strong folks there. Like your story about how Sheila met the White Bunny?"

I nodded. This was true. "But Sheila was just interested in hopping with her after all. I mean nothing bad happened."

"And Betsy wants to meet their Pillows. That's OK."

I looked at Crissy closely. "Do you have your, um, magickal Princess ways of knowing about Doris & her Partners?"

Crissy laughed her pretty laugh. "Go see her & tell her what Betsy said." Then she hugged me & sent me along mah way.

I guess you could say there are really various ways to get to the Creature Common. The way I know best is to fall asleep in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch & then find this strange picture that is a door to there.

The Common is like a sortof house that has changed over time, gotten bigger & smaller both. I always get the feeling that more people live there than I know, but I have not met them yet . . .

Well, anyway, I went from Imagianna back to Bags End & thens to the Bunny Family's apartment where me & mah silly Bumping brother Alexander Puppy live too, & I climbed through our bedroom window to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch.

There I sat awhile, just thinking about it all. Trying to "put mah best Beagle 4orward," is how mah smart guy friend & Bags End News colleague Lori Bunny says it.

Then I falled asleep & I was in Dream Bags End, where I have been so many times, but I have figgered better OK about it than I used to.

I found the picture I was looking 4or of a tall red-haired girl in a Woods, bending over to look at some faerie fellas.

The next step is a tricky one for me. I have to 4orget it's a picture & remember that it's a door, & walk on through while I am balancing this remembering & 4orgetting. It usually works. One time I didn't & mah dream nozebone hurt! Ow!

This time went OK & I found mahself in the Creature Common, & there was mah dear friend Larry the Spyder, who I met first of all of them there.

"Hi, Algie!" he said in his friendly name shortening way.

"Hi, guy!" I said back. "Do you know where Doris is?"

I kind of have a hard time getting around the Creature Common because it is murky to mah eyes.

But he glittery-eyed smiled, & brung me to a nice bed, & on the bed was a sort of royal pile up of Pillows with yellow Doris in her purple cloak on the very top! I could see two nice-looking blue Pillows with pretty colors on them too near her, & I guessed these might be her Partners?

I looked up to Doris & said, "Hi!" She doesn't try to dirty trick me like Betsy in her strange whispery voice. With Doris you have to get nice and close to her softness & somehow friendly talk happens.

I told her about Betsy & her crazed talk, but Doris didn't get scared or mad or nothing.

I asked if she knowed about the Bunny Pillow Farm & Betsy & all that.

Here is where it gets weird, Dear Readers. I guess you could also say it got to & far past weird long ago, & I would see the truth in that too.

But anyway, Doris told me that she helped build to the Bunny Pillow Farm!

I was shocked. Here is what we said like we talked regular words, which we didn't.

"You're the Architect!"

"One of many."

"Many?"

"Hard to say."

I nodded & thinked some more. "Hard to say" means 4or Creatures that mah English is off the path to answers.

"Well, she don't know that."

"No."

"Do any of those Pillows?"

"We never intended to get involved again. It seemed like a bad idea."

"Why? Most big guys I know love to run the show right in everybody's faces all the time."

Doris laughed like I don't know nobody does. She said the Farm had done OK so far. Even when I talked of all the various troubles that had come, Doris didn't think any different.

"Will you meet with Betsy like she demanded?"

"Of course."

"You mean of course not?"

"No. It's OK. She is one of the finest Pillows there is."

I coughed mah mock but Doris is stubborn for a so-soft fella. So, OK, why not?

Doris let me nap close to her softness, & Larry was around again too. I think some of the others I met were nearby too but the murk didn't let me see them so good this time.

Betsy Bunny Pillow Meets Doris!

After I returned to Bags End, I went to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch to have a good think over all these strange events.

I strangely felt like what I was doing mattered. Sort of like history or something. What did this mean?

I sat there a while remembering how mah good friend Princess Crissy had said that fantasylands like Bags End start out by themselves like

somebody's nice secret. Then they get connected to others over time.

I guess Bags End is kinda knowed by some, but the Creature Common isn't, or anyway it wasn't be4ore. Now, because of mah newspaper tellings about it, it's getting there.

I was looking up at the stars to be seen from mah Porch, & thinking how they were all in one sky. It's like something smart to learn just by looking up, & watching, & thinking about it.

So are fantasylands in one sky in some kind of way? Different places but one, um, sky?

It sorta made sense. I mean it did.

I thinked some more. I wanted to keep going until mah brainbone gave out. I figgered I had better hurry as it would not take too long for that.

Nobody in Bags End or maybe even on the Bunny Pillow Farm knowed that Doris & her Partners were some of the Architects of the Bunny Pillow Farm. Only me. And I knowed because I had gone to the Creature Common where Doris lives, & she told me. And she agreed to meet with Betsy like that crazed Pillow demanded.

I figgered whatever happened it would not end up with Betsy being fully in charge of all, like she wanted. But I did not know what would happen.

What I did know was this, tho, was that I was using me & mah newspaper to make things happen, & then write about them. I guess this part sort of bothered me, since I would rather just watch closely & write it all down straight & true, but Crissy always tells me that there's more to me & what good I can do than I can know very easy. I guess so.

Maybe I just hoped Doris could help Betsy a little. 4or all mah weird brawls with that looney Pillow, I sorta admire how she sticks to her guns & won't let nobody do her in by single threat or collective niceness. Anyway--

The question of how to get Betsy to the Creature Common was next to be answered. It was solved easy, though, by Crissy, who figgered up a way 4or Betsy to come with me by a picture in the hallway of the waking Bags End.

"I know you are more used to the dream path," she said, smiling at me.

I nodded. "But Betsy needs to believe in this & she is kinda crazier than usual right now."

So I went to see Betsy in her Secret Clubhouse headquarters. O boy! Let me tell you next.

Betsy was dressed in some kind of crazy rainbow colored cape, & she said she would bring with her a large retinue of Prime Allies to this Summit.

"What Summit? No. And no. No, um, retinue. Just you & me going to see Doris as friendly as we can," I said, deciding that mah role in this mattered & Betsy should respect that.

Ha. Again, Ha! Once more so nobody 4orgets, HA! Betsy had me up against the wall with so many ready threats old & new I could hardly whimper mah life's last protest.

"You are irrelevant to all this! Less than a thought! Less than a flea!" Betsy whisper screamed.

Mah too-brief life was on the point of concluding when one of Betsy's Elder Allies stepped up & separated us. Elder Allies? I don't know. Words.

The compromise I agreed to or else was that Betsy's Allies would stand ready to invade & annihilate the Creature Common at Betsy's word. I know Allies are more wanting to protect Betsy than anything else, but it always makes me mad when--

"Beagle!!! Lead the way or be snuffed!"

I led the way to the picture Crissy had helped me put up in a little-

known shadowy part of a hallway in Bags End. Crissy gived me a magick password to make the picture into a doorway.

The picture was not the one of the girl & her faeries like in mah dream. It was snowy & there was a big pretty lighted up building far away in it.

Ready, I said, "Men at Work!" which is mah favorite band! And me & Betsy were helped by her Allies to climb on through.

"Take care of her," whispered the Allies as they helped me climb through. I nodded to be nice.

What happened next is hard to tell in the plain talking way. But what happened in some order is that Betsy went through, & saw Doris & her Partners, & let out a terrified cry, & there was a terrible fight, & I got knocked around, & I thought I heard Betsy call 4or help or maybe invasion, & then I was knocked out like I was asleep.

When I woke up, I was not in the Creature Common or back in Bags End either. It was a grassy place I sorta knowed but not quite. Betsy was with Doris & her Partners, & they were I think talking in that touching way Doris does.

I didn't move, but decided to quietly listen to their talk & not interrupt. Maybe save mahself a smothering or snuffing or whatever too.

"Dreams," said Doris.

"No," disagreed Betsy, but more polite than usual, which is never.

"You do it all the time with your Miss Chris."

Betsy said nothing.

"Part of our work is to help people-folks do better with their dreams. Give them ease going in & comfort to learn from them."

Betsy didn't like this, I just knew it.

"It's why this Farm started. When it starts. Some of us agreed to be Pillows, take that form, & create others & do this really important work. If you want to lead the Pillows again, you will have to understand this & act by it. If not, you will war with the others 4or control of something you refuse to understand."

O boy!

The Great Pillow Summit!

Writing about Betsy Bunny Pillow has been one of mah more terrorizig tasks over the years. Betsy gets just about mountain high crazy with anyone who isn't a Pillow, or helping her on her way to leading her Pillows to final triumph over who she says to.

4or a long time, she said to defeat Farmer Jones who ran the Bunny Pillow Farm. Betsy escaped his intentions to sell her like the many others to rich people, & she fought a long war to free the rest of the Pillows. She defeated Jones & drove him off, & it looked like she could enjoy the liberation of what she called the Bunny Pillow Free State.

But trouble set in in different ways, as trouble has a way of doing. Betsy exiled to far dreams the strange Face Pillows who threatened her idears of what Pillows are. That didn't work, partly because of me.

Then it turned out that the Pillows on the Farm were having trouble growing more of them. Betsy could not solve this either, & so the other Pillows brought back Jones to help.

This about made Betsy endlessly insane, & she looked 4or ways to defeat

Bass End News
 No. 332 November 27, 2010
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Thee Grate Pillo Summit!

Rithy about Betsee Buny Pillo
 haz beene wun of mah most terrorizing
 tasks ovr thee yeers. Betsee
 getz jst about mowsten hi krazy
 with emuwun whoo izent a pillo or
 helping her on her waye too feeding
 her pilloz to find triumf ovr whoos
 she sez to.

For a long tm, shee sed too defect
 Farmr Jonz whoo ran thee Buny Pillo
 farm. Betsee escaped hiz intensions
 too sell her jk, thee money wth
 too rich peepel, & then shee fauf
 a long war too freey the rest of
 thee pilloz. Shee defected Jonz
 & drov him awtt & itt took 1 1/2 yrs
 shee cood enjoye thee lib

Bass End News
 Double Issue!
 No. 334-335 December 4-11, 2010
 Editor: Algernon Beagle
 King: Sheila Bunny
 Lead Lead Creature: Threshold Puggle
 Written Down By: Lori Bunny

Thee Grate Pillo Summit (Part 2 & Grand Finellee!)

I suppos I thawt I nowd mzt
 of wat thees waz about buny
 pilloz, sins I had rited about Betsee
 Buny Pillo so nencee stons. Butt
 then I startid viziting thee Creechen
 Common & I mett Dorriss & her partners.
 An then Betsee & Dorriss mett &
 itt terns out nott onley are Dorriss
 & her partners also sum of thee
 in site kts of thee Buny Pillo Farm
 butt so ar Betsees Alliz!
 So Okave then, O & thee part
 about Farmr Jonzes beeing a guid
 gu whoo gott trikkd & then had
 too protect the farm & then forget

the Collective that was now working with her old enemy Jones.

I got mixed up in all this again when I accidentally told Betsy about mah Pillow friend Doris in the Creature Common. Betsy demanded a meeting with this unknown to her Pillow &, with Crissy's help, it happened.

Now I found mahself listening to them talk back in the past, when the Bunny Pillow Farm wasn't made yet. And it was all about dreams & Betsy taking charge of the Pillows! I had been listening quietly till now, but mah BeagleBoy journalist ways could take it no longer.

"How come she gets to be leader!" I cried. "She bullies & threatens everyone else, & she don't care nothing about growing Pillows. Just being a big shot!"

Betsy was in mid-flight toward me with smothering on her mind when Doris moved slightly & Betsy was frozen in mid-air & returned back lightly to where she & Doris & Doris's Partners had been talking on the grass near me. O. I bet Betsy thought O, too.

Then Doris answered me, out loud this time too, in a nice voice. "My Partners & I have stepped back in to right things that have gone wrong. Not by making anybody do what they don't want, but by telling the story that needs to be heard. Betsy, you listen & ask me what you want. Algernon, I trust you will tell what we say in your fine newspaper."

Fine newspaper! Doris was some kind of powerful new big guy too now. Sorta like Crissy though. I nodded & I listened good as I could.

Doris waited a moment in thinking, then talked. "First, I want to tell you about Farmer Jones."

Betsy would have gone smothering crazy but Doris held her still with a thought or something.

"As a young man, he had as many ideals as you. He believed what the Dreaming Pillows did with people-folks would help them overcome their mistakes & find a way to live in peace with each other & the world. We chose him 4or his big heart & his devotion to learning always deeper the ways of the world."

Be4ore I could think to ask or talk, Doris said, "Yes, we chose him to run the Farm. And he did it well until the ways of people-folks, which he followed from afar, got too awful 4or him.

"Then he made a decision to leave the Farm to venture again among men & try to find an answer. He met with many but none could help him. Each only wanted to use the Pillows as a weapon for a cause."

We were listening nutty close.

"Eventually, he met a man who seemed to care. He told Jones he could help. He said it was the rich & powerful, who you call the big guys, Algernon, who needed the Pillows most, & could help right the world.

"He said they would only value the Pillows, though, if they cost a lot of money, & seemed to give without asking in return.

"So Jones agreed to sell the Pillows & only at great cost to this man. He was fooled, our Jones, but this man made him believe the trick 4or years. And when people-folks didn't treat each other or the world any better, Jones tried to back out.

"But he couldn't. The man said he would see the Bunny Pillow Farm destroyed if he tried to.

"Jones had 4orgotten how he had come to the Farm or who he had been be4ore. He only knew that he had to protect it. It got so mixed up in his mind that by when you, Betsy, came along, he was like your slave master. And you didn't know any of this."

Betsy demanded to know now why they didn't tell her sooner & why now?

"Because you became the leader the Pillows needed, we didn't think to interfere. But now, as you oppose everyone on the Farm, & reached out to me & my Partners to join this fight, we knew it was time."

I was about exhausted with this explanation, but I guess it made sense. I just wondered what now.

"You must learn the Dreaming Path of Pillows. Learn it & teach everyone on the Farm. You must make peace with Farmer Jones, who is now remembering who he is. You must be the leader of the Pillows by the work you will do, & the things you will learn & then teach."

Betsy nodded. It was weird as the world to see her agree, but I figured she wanted to be the big shot & here was an even bigger shot telling her how. I don't mean to say that mean, but I wasn't sure how this crazed Pillow was gonna calm down & get all wise & learned. And show others how.

Then Betsy surprised me more than all else. "I don't know if I can," she whispered quietly. "I am an old soldier in the War. Maybe those Face Pillows can."

Doris surprised me too by laughing. "No, Betsy, you are the one. Your Allies will help you prepare."

Then a bright idear popped through mah brainbone to mah mouth be4ore I could stop it. "Say, Doris, those Allies are more of the Architects, aren't they? Just not in Pillow 4orm?"

I could feel Doris smiling in mah mind. Even Betsy was, which shocked me in its niceness.

What a strange new turn in this story's path!

The Great Pillow Summit! **(Part 2 & Grand Finally!)**

I suppose I thought I knowed most of what there was to know about Bunny Pillows, since I had writed so many stories about Betsy Bunny Pillow. But then I started visiting the Creature Common, & I met Doris & her Partners. And then Betsy & Doris met & it turns out not only are Doris & her Partners some of the Architects of the Bunny Pillow Farm, but so are Betsy's Allies!

And then there is the part of the story about Farmer Jones being a good guy who got tricked, & then had to protect the Farm, & then 4orgot he was a good guy. Yah, it's a lot to work with.

But it went on. Goes on, that is. Doris explained that Pillows, at least what I think of as Bunny Pillows, are meant to be Dream Pillows, to help people-folks to dream better, & to listen to their dreams more.

I don't know many people-folks really. I know Miss Chris in Connecticut, & Ramie her Toy Tall Boy Brother, is sort of people-folks too. O & Princess Crissy. Not much more though. Why wouldn't they like dreams & listen to them?

"They don't think they are real, Algernon," said that nice & smart yellow Doris in her purple cloak. It was just me & her Partners talking now. Partners mostly listening quietly.

"Hm. Like how they think about fantasylands?"

"Yes. What's real most importantly to people-folks is people-folks, their concerns & lives."

"Not everyone is like that?"

"Most are. It's how they're taught."

"Taught?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Doris laughed & I figured that was 4or answer. But she talked more.

"They're scared & they need simple answers about the world."

"O. Like what?" I figgered I would keep asking till I got it or got the boot.

"Well, some of them think the world was made by someone just like them, only he was first & more powerful."

"O."

"And some think the world isn't real but a sort of test to pass through."

"Hm."

"But most just want to be liked by other people-folks, & will do whatever seems to help that."

"So that means dreams aren't real because they are too hard?"

Doris laughed again & I thought that meant yes or close enough.

I remembered mah BeagleBoy journalist duties & put away mah bigger questions 4or another time.

"So you sent Betsy to make peace at the Bunny Pillow Farm?"

"Yes."

"And why can't I go?"

"She has to go alone. She has to make her peace or start to. That's best. You'll be there 4or the Great Pillow Summit."

Hm. I must admit she was persuasive in her thoughts, & she was soft too. Hard to beat.

So I backed off a step & said, "I guess mah nozebone 4or news likes to be on the spot."

"The real news is the Summit. You have work to do be4ore it."

"I do?"

"Well, it would be good if a few Lead Creatures from Bags End could come."

"You mean big guys?"

She laughed briefly.

"And don't 4orget Princess Crisakah!"

Well now, thinked me, here I was more an event organizer. Still, something kept telling me this was like history or something. I mean, it seemed like maybe all the Pillows would meet & figger out their Pillow business once & 4or all.

O, I had mah usual doubts about any cooperation a big guy like Betsy could give 4or very long. Big guys are big guys, in mah book. I just could not see the angle that this all was bad.

So I came back to Bags End & decided to do mah part. But I was wondering something too. I did not see why only just the big guys could come to the Summit? I figgered everybody in Bags End had put up with Betsy's crazy ways, so why would they not like to see a big Pillow peace-making?

First I went to see mah adopted sister Sheila Bunny, real Mayor & would-be King of Bags End, in her Throne Room. She was slouched down in her Throne when I came in, half-napping. But talked.

"I know, I know, Pillows make nice," she sounded almost grumpy about it. Almost, ha! See, big guys can be OK about other big guys 4or awhile, but sooner or later, or sooner, they get bored or grumpy of it all.

I sat mahself down on the matt Sheila had put down on mah usual resting spot. She was nice 4or that minute.

"Are you gonna come, Sheila?"

"Yah." I felt Sheila eyeing me. "Why are you not your usual cheerleading

self? It's a good story?"

"I guess so. I mean yes & I guess so too." Then I got up & left. I had to think mah own thoughts & that meant going to mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch.

It was a lot to take in. Would a Great Pillow Summit figger it all out? I thinked & I thinked & I could not suss mah own discontent.

So I did what I usually do, which is when confused I go to see Princess Crissy in Imagianna. She was on mah telling about the Great Pillow Summit invite list anyway.

I found her sitting under our favorite oak tree. She was holding a pen & writing on some paper. But I noticed as I came closer she was more staring far away at the sky than writing. Then she see'd me & she smiled. I wanted to ask about her writing, but I was too shy at the moment.

So I just jumped in & talked about the Great Pillow Summit & mah assignment.

"Why am I bothered, Crissy? I like Doris a lot & she is helping all the Pillows make peace. I don't get me & I don't like it much."

Crissy holded me in her lap & thinked awhile while skritchng mah nozebone. Exxxstasis.

"What does a BeagleBoy journalist do, Algernon?"

"Um, wait. Hey! That's me!"

"Yes, that's your name 4or what you do. But what do you do?"

Now Crissy is no mean fooling tricky guy to laugh loud later. When she asks a question, it's to know what's what.

So I thinked. No hurry.

"Well, I write stories about Bags End, where I live, & I write about places Bags End knows."

"Is there more?"

"Um, I guess I tell what I know, or somebody else says. I try to tell the story straight & true, but I can get tricked. Some are like that."

Crissy nodded. "Do you make the stories?"

"No, not really. I mean, I tell them but usually somebody else is making them. I think."

Crissy smiled. "It's OK, Algernon. See, I think you need to make sure Doris knows that you don't have a boss of your newspaper. Not even Sheila. You write it your way, straight & true as you can, & people like that. They know you use your smarts as best you can to tell the stories."

I nodded. "So what was I grumpy about?"

"I think you weren't afraid of everything going right at the Great Pillow Summit. You were afraid about being made to take a side if something goes wrong."

"Yes!" I cried. Leaping up! "Yes! How would I know who to choose & how could I write to all mah readers if I was on a side? I mean, no, um." Ran out of words.

Crissy made me sit again. "Go on. You're close."

"Well, it's not so much choosing sides as being made a teammate already. I need to go with mah mind open to decide while I watch. I have to think mah own thinkings!"

Crissy nodded. I smiled & hugged her quickly & said I had to go. She said she would see me later.

I had to hurry & I knowed only one sure fast way there. So from Milne's Porch I leaned 4orward on the railing & tried to summon the Blondys 3, these magick girls I know. I yelled politely 4or them.

They came quicker than usual. And they floated me to the Bunny

Pillow Farm even faster than that. Float because they don't know the Law of Grabitee, ya know.

It was a good thing too because it was crazy there. One whole field was all tore up by Betsy Bunny Pillow & Farmer Jones in a tremendous fight, surrounded by a big crowd of yelling Pillows!

I told the Blondys 3 thank you as they landed me, & rushed up to the crowd.

"Why are they fighting?" I said to everybody & nobody. "This isn't peacemaking!"

One Pillow turned to me & said, "Are you a Beagle or a Beagle-shaped Pillow?"

Well, I thinked a minute & realized I had to use mah brave I hadn't brung to stop that fight.

So I pushed through the Pillow crowds, wishing it was harder, & finally I was there.

"Betsy, stop!" me & Jones both yelled at the same time. He looked beat up & raggedy. Then he was hiding behind me! Sorta.

Betsy bounced up slowly to me. Very slowly. "Defending the Great Traitor, Beagle?"

"Me? What about what Doris said?" I stood mah ground, borrowing brave from future decades every minute.

I was lucky that just as Betsy tired of mah Beagle being, & leapt to smother me, a large number of Allies stepped in front of me. While they held back that crazed Pillow, one whispered to me, "Run, Algernon! Get Doris!"

So I runned fast. Back in Bags End I found the picture that Crissy gived me to get Betsy awake & easy to the Creature Common. Used it quick.

"Doris!"

"It's OK, Algernon. If this is her way to learn, by fighting everyone, let her do it."

"No."

"No?"

I shook mah head in this still too-murky place. "Doris, this isn't Betsy learning. It's Betsy being scared & crazy from how it was when she left there & runned away to Bags End. She doesn't get that things are different now. Or they always were. She hears the words but they're not true right now in her heart-bone."

Doris was listening tho I couldn't say how I knowed.

"We gotta go, Doris, now."

"And we need to bring a friend of mine too."

"The White Bunny?"

"She's a Tender, like me," Doris explained, using a word I had heard be4ore but in some new way.

Going with Doris & the White Bunny was a lot faster than mah slow-pawed way.

I'd like to say I understood what happened next. The Allies turned over the quieter but still crazy Betsy to Doris & the White Bunny. They didn't hold her back from Jones anymore. They, um, tendered her, which I think has to do with calming a guy's heartbone down. But I don't have words so I won't try to.

They took Betsy with them 4or more tendering I guess. I think it will take at least a double dose.

So there we were now, at the Great Pillow Summit, with some of the most important Pillows not even there anymore.

I looked at Farmer Jones, sitting on the tore up ground, covered in

mud. "So you remember, huh?"

He nodded, sadly.

I looked at him more. "You were a lot of trouble 4or a long time."

He nodded again, no fight left in him. It's like he was waked up & sad 4or looking around. I nodded too. Things were different now.

With no afraid in me, I offered mah paw to him. He shook it. I looked at all the Pillows gathered round us, nodded to them too, & left to come back to Bags End.

Sitting here now in mah comfy armchair on Milne's Porch, tired but still thinking about it all. I guess I figger things are better than they were, but I think Betsy's old craziness won't be totally solved by tendering. Maybe calmed down though.

This story ends here, Dear Readers, but I will be back soon. And so will Betsy!



* * * * * THE END * * * * *



Gregory Kelly



<< unsteady >>

'The neck and face
prepped and draped
in sterile fashion'

the razor blade

owns a corner
of the windowsill

he is an unforgiving tenant
despising his handicap
demeaned by the fact
that he lacks mobility
and is carried

i begged Jesus

for healing
was low
-ered
from the
roof top
to the operating suite
where 'Everyone in the room
confirmed the identity of the patient'

and i begged

and i took the razor to my throat
with my hand upturned cupping
a prayer cupping
the air between each breath
each breath
between each prayer

each hair fell to the sink
while the razor never relented
his homily severed an unkempt beard

i felt
each felled
tree uprooted
each begging
prayer each
praying tear
each suicidal fear

GOD WHAT IS IT THAT YOU DO NOT HEAR?

even the voice
of Abel's blood
cried from the
ground

i bled	in the	sink	the
night	before	i	presented
for	definitive	excision	
and		repair	

my hand unsteady
the razor unsteady

no one is ever ready to shoulder a cancerous burden

* * * * *





The Crocodile King of Belize

[Prose]

(Continued from *Cenacle* | 107 | April 2019)

ix. The Witch in the Market - September 2nd, 2010

Pelicans sit on the roof of the concrete building, eying the fish below. Fish of all sizes are piled on cement tables in this open-walled building. Behind each pile is its hopeful seller, lazily sweeping his hand over a black hoard of flies obscuring his wares. With each sweep, a cloud rises up and then resettles on the other side, as though the fishmonger was swinging his arm under a black sheet.

The big fish, the ones in the two-foot-long range, sell first, as do the snook and the barracuda, both delectable predators that are hard to catch but remarkably tasty. The next most desired are the rock cod, at about a pound each and bedecked with poisonous spines. The vendors call all of these fish “red snapper” in the hopes of a faster sale with a recognized name.

Next to this house of ichthyological wonder is the meat market. Through an adjacent open doorway is another cement room with meat vendors. Nothing is packaged. Nothing is even chopped into edible cuts. Nothing is sanitary. Flies are two inches thick on everything. Some vendors have a half a cow up on their tables, as they cat-call for trolling purchasers, a fourteen-inch knife in each hand, held as though they were about to cut the Thanksgiving turkey.

Shoppers snap at the meat with a handkerchief to disperse the flies and see whatever kind is underneath. Some concrete slabs have piles of odd meat cuts, like parts of legs, ribs, hip-bones, and a variety of skinned heads. A skinned cow-head can be had somewhat cheaply by a frugally shopping mother, and it will feed her clan in gristle and soup for at least a week. The eyeballs are a delicacy.

Only one new guy from Haiti is selling ground beef. No one trusts this. *What is exactly in this?* It is too processed for this part of the world, where people start their dinners with raw vegetables, and animals still walk around in their yards.

“The Market” is a three-block affair on the seaside of the street. A one-story-high facade, like a concrete imitation of a California strip mall. The shop openings are sunken back in from the street, so no one uses them except for socializing. Inside these open-wall rooms, old folks sip coffee, bums drink two-dollar rums, dogs hide, and trash accumulates.

In front of these open spaces are fifty vegetable stalls set up on the street. These are made of scrap lumber: a board here, a pallet there, and some frayed plastic flaps off on one side reminiscent of a rainy day. Each of these rickety 6 x 6 foot stalls has exactly the same assortment of somewhat grubby and odd shaped vegetables for sale—tomatoes, potatoes, carrots, yams—and all charge the same thing.

All the stalls are operated by Mayan women, brightly dressed in blue and red silk dresses. There is no historical precedent for this. Mayans did not have silk, nor did their women dress up. But the fashion for these women appears to derive from the Basques of central Spain—ground-dragging hoop dresses of three colors, ready for the next Flamenco dance that they have never seen.

Among these fifty vendors there is a code of ethics that is obscure to the shoppers. The shoppers go from stall to stall for carrots and they are a buck a pound at each one. No variation. The

Mayans have a social norm that “no one shall get over on another.” This means that one of them cannot undercut the price of carrots and sell off their entire inventory. This would be a taboo thing, as one Mayan lady would be rich and the rest stuck with their table of goods. By all having exactly the same price, then one is not rich and another poor. Even when week-old wilted veggies are put out next to crisp fresh veggies, the price is the same.

There are others who bend these rules. These are the Mennonite men, wearing solid color blue shirts, OshKosh B’gosh suspender farmer overalls, and large straw hats. These fellows sell watermelons and cream. The cream is kept in a bucket with a lid, not really out of the sun, and sold in plastic sandwich baggies tied at one end. It is nearly as thick as white butter. A corner of the bag is bitten off and the cream squeezed out of the hole, like toothpaste. The melons are hauled in from twenty miles away in a horse-drawn buggy. It is usually parked not far away under a fig tree, where the horse eats its fill of riotous road grass.

Isabella, with two of her children in tow, has come to the market with her usual fare of vegetables, including many left over from last week. As the morning crawls on, Isabella cannot concentrate on her vegetable inventory. She doesn’t care really, as she is possessed with the fate of two of her other children, Benjamin and Veronica. The missing parts of her soul.

The Mayan women do not grow any of the produce, but buy it cheaply from the Mennonites and re-sell it. When they do not re-sell it, it keeps coming out on the table until it’s sold, no matter how many weeks it takes. The Mayans do not eat any of the produce. Vegetables are abhorrent to them—alien food. It’s as if eels were served at McDonald’s instead of French fries. Inedible and disgusting.

Only rich First-Worlders eat the stuff pigs consume: lettuce, cucumbers, onions, and other wasted growths. A good healthy Mayan diet is *corn*, and only corn. Everything can be made with corn, and everything is. Once in a while an iguana is caught and roasted, or maybe a turtle, but the food of the day is corn. As it is every day. Isabella has fresh ears of corn on the table, as well as two buckets of dried corn ears—as hard as gravel.

Around three o’clock, the stalls begin packing up. Isabella is in a haze of her own misery, holding one baby, and with another child whose arms are wrapped around her legs.

The other Mayan women tell her to come with them to meet a *Person-Who-Knows*. Through the stalls to the back of the building, on the sea-front side, stairs lead down to concrete rooms built into the hill. Around the entrance to one of these windowless rooms is a crowd of thirty-some Mayan women, all in their bright dresses, looking from above as if the burst of a giant piñata full of children’s candy. The women all pack into the room. Standing room only. The air is dark and thick with womanly sweat. Copal smoke, the religious incense sap that is burned at all ceremonies, fills the room in a blue haze. The acrid smoke only dimly masks the smell of thirty-some unwashed women.

In the back corner is a shriveled old woman surrounded by candles and smoking copal burners. Isabella does not know this person. She is not from any village in southern Belize. She is from the cave in the blue mountains deep in the Guatemalan Cordillera. The other women describe her as visionary, a prophet, a *Person-Who-Knows*. Everyone else calls her a witch. The old woman mumbles something in a low chant, using the Mayan Kekchi language. All the chattering women fall silent. Then she speaks.

“We are here today to hear of the true vision given to me from the god Imchock!” Some shuffling and murmurs in the room, then all is quiet.

“Imchock has told me who has committed the heinous crime of stealing and killing the children Benjamin and Veronica. The children were lured to the place with sweetmeat sandwiches. While they laid tied to a table, their kidneys were chopped out. These are the white devils of the crocodile sanctuary at the mouth of the Monkey River!” she cries. The room is full of gasps and disbelief.

"But what happened to the children?" one woman shouts.

"The children were chopped up while alive. The white woman devil danced naked around the table as the white man devil wielded the butcher's knife!" More horror from the crowd, somewhat for the crime, but also for the violation of their prudish morals against any public nudity. The Christians have polluted their minds with their pentecostal pedagogy of pain.

The witch continues. "When the children stopped screaming for their lives, as they had no more life in them, their bodies were chopped up and taken out to the crocodile farm. The housedogs licked all the blood off the table and floor. The white man devil then called the crocodiles by name. 'Come, Luis! Come, Fuego! Come, Diablo!' The crocodiles swirled up to the edge of the dock where the white man devil handed out chunks of child meat to each—until it was all gone. Then the white man devil sat back and felt happy that his crocodiles had eaten so well."

The Mayan women were wailing softly and crying with Isabella, who herself was sobbing with a look of horror on her face. There was much jostling about, as if the movement of all those colorful dresses was some kind of ritual dance.

The witch stood on the table in the back, her arms raised in triumphant indignity. "The white man devil done killed them. Done killed the children!" she pronounces, wild-eyed. Soft cries of agony rise up through the crowd.

"We must avenge!" shouts one.

"The white devils must pay!" shouts another.

"Kill the murderers!" says yet another.

"In the Name of Hunab Ku!" shouts the witch above all the rest. "We will bring the devils to justice. Mayan justice in the name of the fathers of our fathers. No white man law will deny us! We are vexed! We want the white people blood for blood as the white people's Bible teaches us!" No one seems to care that ancient Mayan gods are working side by side with the white Christian gods. Revenge is all that matters.

"Go home. Go to your villages and go to your men. Bring them out and save our people. Avenge the little ones. Be as *Balam* (jaguar). *Yu'um Bootik* (Mayan God be with you)."

The crowd backs up slowly to the door, leaking a few at a time into the sunshine, like colored jelly beans dropping to a white floor. Soon the mass is out of the room with Isabella and two other women holding her up. All three are sobbing with dark angry faces.

x. Land Deal - June 2008

White Patrick is a white man in the ex-pat uniform of khaki shorts and a Hawaiian shirt. He is drinking tea under a ceiling fan with a small computer on his desk.

"Cheerio, fellas. What can I do for you on this fine day?" he greets in his thick British accent. White Patrick works for an international real estate firm that mostly deals with selling off the great plantations of the British to North Americans, small lot by small lot. The land is all wild jungle, so it's about the same deal as the Florida land scam of the 1960s.

After introductions, White Patrick is distracted by and leering at Rose in her short-shorts and tank top.

"Patrick!" almost yells JC.

"Yes. Yes. What were we looking at?"

"We weren't looking at anything. We found the place we want. We want you to put together the paperwork."

"Yes. Yes. OK. You are looking at the old sugar cane dock near the mouth of the Monkey River."

"That's right. Do you know who owns it?"

"Yes. Yes I do. It is owned by the Mahee family. Carlo Mahee is handling the estate now. I'm sure he will sell it to you. I'll call him now."

Ring. Ring. The phone is picked up but nothing said.

"Mahee?" says Patrick.

"Unhhha."

"You want to sell to some Americans?"

"Unhhha."

"Meet us Walooko's?"

"Yeah. Unhhha."

They both hang up without confirming the time. It is a mystery if anything has even been arranged.

Walooko's is more like a cabana bar than a diner. There are no walls and the sea air blows off the Caribbean, across the frontage road, and up the skirts of the clientele. Lunch is ordered at the bar, as there is only one lunch served here. It is mostly unidentifiable chicken chunks stewed in a chili/curry sauce that will kill most jungle bacteria. It is served with black beans, a fried plantain, and the ubiquitous rice. It's really quite tasty and filling for five bucks BZ (Belize dollars).

The main food in all this land used to be corn, and still is for most Mayans, but the Chinese, in concert with the Quaker Oats Company, makers of Rice-a-Roni, have changed the carbohydrate consumption of central America. Now Mayans are encouraged to grow rice, and are cheated when selling to the Yankee-owned mill. Rice is more difficult to grow, and must be done on flat, flooded land. But most Mayans live in the foothills where they have to slash and burn to plant new runty corn. Although they are robbed by the wholesale purchaser, they still need money for all the other things in this world besides corn, and it takes a group effort among families to succeed.

Everyone settles around a table, including Black Patrick, who is angling for a free lunch for his networking. Coca-Colas are brought around, at an additional \$1.50 a bottle. Each has a napkin carefully origami'd into the top opening. The glass is frosted from the cola bottle being refilled many times in Mexico. In theory, the bottle is washed and sterilized between refillings but, then again, this is the Third World where nobody gives a shit, so your drink could be pure cola formula, or something else from spit to fingernails. But the weather is so hot, and the cola is cold, that the sugared beverage is enjoyed no matter what the contamination might be.

Mahee launches into a manifesto-style monologue, describing how the Guatemalans are overrunning the Belizean borders, chopping down the trees, stealing the resources, selling drugs, and raping the women. The first part is believable, as truck loads of mahogany boards are heading into Chinese containers every day, but the rest is exaggeration, as the aliens are no different than their brothers on the other side of the border, and are really just peaceful farmers.

"The Guats are trying to claim Sarstoon Island that sits right on our seaward border. It is sovereign Belizean land, but the Guatemalan Navy has two gunboats circling the thing so no BZ'ean can land there and plant our flag," says Mahee angrily.

"But how do you stop them? I mean, gunboats and all?" asks JC.

"Arms, my friend. We need to militarize and hold these encroachers at bay. The bastards are not only at sea, but are pouring over the border on the western side. We need to show them that we are armed and willing to stop them."

"I agree," says JC, even though he is totally uninformed on the political posturing and saber-rattling between these two countries. "How can we accomplish that?"

Mahee breaks into a wide grin. His skin is just milk chocolate color, but still his teeth gleam brightly in contrast. "My dear friend, we will make the land deal, but we must sweeten it with what you can bring from your country. Armaments."

Rose perks up at this, as she knows that her family makes most of the guns in the world.

She has eaten a few black beans but fears future flatulence. On her plate are two chicken feet blindly gripping the air in an arthritic spasm. Nothing is more abhorrent than these two dismembered feet to her. To most of the protein-starved residents here, the feet are the delicacy of the chicken, but all Rose can think of is these toes squishing around in the thick shit-mud of the chicken yard. This is not really food to her, but more like garbage heaped on her plate

"Mek it no gusta Polo subatos?" Black Patrick asks her.

"He's wondering if you are going to eat those feet," translates Allen, who is still along for the ride because nothing else is happening, and lunch is always a good idea on a lazy tropical day. A fine opportunity for a few "stouts" also, which is a bitter beer brewed by the state beer monopoly.

"No. No, they are disgusting anyway. What part of those do you even eat?" asks Rose. Black Patrick reaches greedily across the table for them. Holding them in his seemingly grubby hand, he sucks the skin off the toes with great slurping noises. Rose retreats behind her Coca-Cola bottle, sliding down in her chair, holding the icon of civilization out in front of her face, as if to ward off the gastric degeneration of humanity.

Mahee suddenly says, "A half a million, US dollars."

"That's stupid. Where the hell did you get a price like that for mangrove swamp at the end of the earth?"

"I use comparables."

"Yes. The comparables are the coastline properties. It's really a very good deal," says White Patrick.

"Yeah. Good for you," replies JC. "How can that infestation of mosquitoes be worth more than 100 grand?"

"It is what the market will bear. A Danish guy just bought 50 acres on the coast for 40 thousand an acre, and you are getting over 80 acres. A good price, I tell you," says White Patrick.

"I don't think I can come up with that much loot. Is there anything that can be done with the price?" JC asks.

"Well, yes. There may be . . ." says Mahee.

"What? What would that be? What can we do?"

"You can help the people's Peace and Freedom Party. The PFP."

"Huh? Is that your organization that's fighting with the Guatemalans?"

"Yes. You can help us . . . by helping us take up arms against them."

"You mean supply guns?"

"Yes. Our Peace and Freedom Party needs guns. Lots of them. Most of the police force here are members of the party, so any 'donation' you might make would go toward our law enforcement officers. The community would be safer."

"Since when is a community safer when more guns are brought in and handed out?" chimes in Rose.

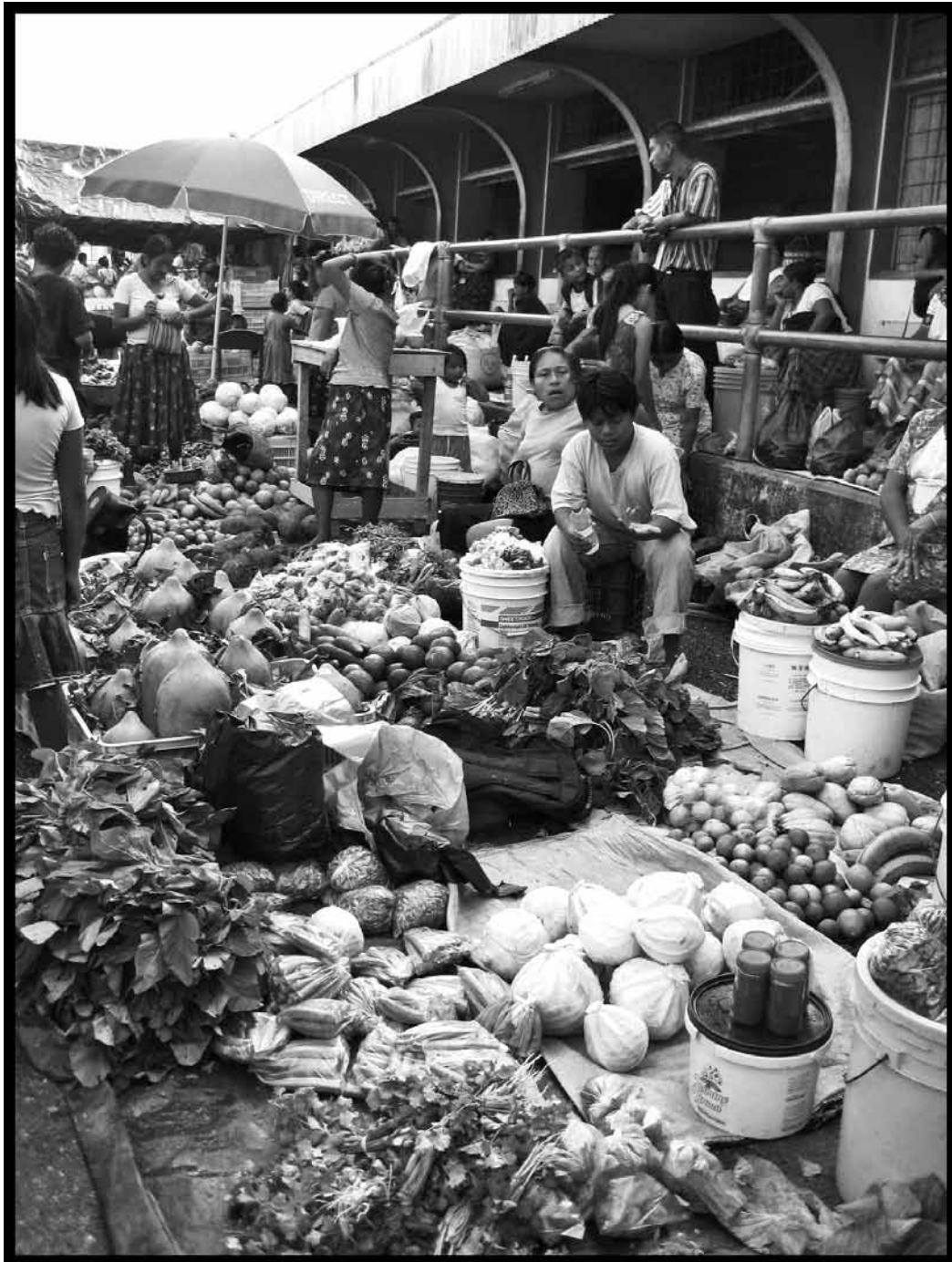
Ignoring the statement, Mahee continues: "Our empowered police will be able to better curb crime here in PG as well as protect us from any Guatemalan incursion."

"Isn't that the job of the Army?" asks White Patrick.

"Yes, that is true. But the Army has no money. They do not even have ammunition for their guns. They never leave their barracks because their trucks are broken and the commanding officers are frequently on vacation. There is no one to give orders and no one who will get off their ass to do anything," says Mahee.

"Then why do they have a BDF (Belizean Defense Force) anyway?" asks Rose incredulously.

"It's a holdover from the British. When they left, they handed the BDF over to the new administration, whose money all went to new mansions for the government officials. The BDF camps were ignored and quickly fell into ruin, as none of the recruits would fix anything, or even



knew how to fix anything.”

“What do you mean? What did the militia do?”

“They did nothing. They let all the plumbing break so that there was only one shower, and then the power fell down so that they live in the dark after nightfall. All they do is cook rice and sleep in hammocks all day. They are completely useless parasites,” exclaims Mahee with disgust.

“So if the Guatemalans invaded, there would be nobody to protect us?”

“That’s right. It’s up to us to defend ourselves and keep the filthy Guatemalans out of our land. *Long live the Peace and Freedom Party!*” Mahee adds with a flourish.

“But how do you expect us to get any armaments into your country? Don’t you have a ban on guns in effect for all citizens?” asks JC.

“Yes, we do. But we are the police. We have to have weapons for security.”

“So . . . how does that work?”

“If you get the weapons, I’ll knock a hundred thousand dollars off the land price. And I mean a lot of weapons, enough to outfit fifty men. I’ll make arrangements with Customs to waive the container through, and get it shipped directly to Punta Gorda,” explains Mahee.

“Damn, that sounds great. This is doable now. We can make this happen. Crocodiles and guns! What could be cooler? Nothing! That’s what!” exclaims the excited JC.

“*Mi mek gunns cum no beah for chance man,*” says Black Patrick.

“Oh, shut the fuck up,” says Mahee, not liking the derogatory tone of the statement.

“OK, I’ll start on the paperwork to be run through the lands office. I’ll delineate my real estate fee also,” says White Patrick.

“Just what *is* that fee?” asks JC.

“Seven percent for me and three percent for Black Patrick, who showed you the place,” says White Patrick.

“Holy shit. You guys are thieves! How complicated can it be?”

“In Belize, nothing is simple,” says Mahee.

“All power to the PFP!” shouts Allen, who has just finished his third beer on Mahee’s bill.

xi - Trust the Police? - September 3rd, 2010

“Oh, where are my darling children now?” is the question mulled over and over in Isabella’s mind. She thinks of them, cold and alone in some overbearing jungle, nothing but plants and mud around them. Then her thinking goes dark. That they are not in the scary but safe jungle, but tied up by some pervert who is intent on doing them harm. A maniac with a knife.

Oh My God! What horror the mind can conjure. Oh pray by the Hunal-ye, the God of Corn, that this is not happening. Oh pray by the white Jesus to protect the innocents. Oh pray by all that is holy that they are all right.

Isabella sits on the edge of the bed and cries. She is not crying to get her way with Nathan. She is not crying to commiserate with her neighbor, her friend, who is constantly beaten by her husband. She is crying deep gut wrenching sobs of despair and helplessness. A sorrow of infinite loss.

Presently, Nathan comes to sit beside her. In Mayan fashion, nothing is said. Nor do they touch, have an arm around each other, or even hold hands, for this is also not of Mayan culture. To show affection is weakness, the realm of women. Nathan sits, staring at the dirt floor. Isabella sobs.

After a long time, she speaks up. “Nathan, I don’t think we can trust the police to find our children.”

“Why do you think that?”

“Because they threw us out of the police station. Because there is no one assigned to this case. Because no one except us seems to care.”

"But they may come up with something."

"But they probably will not. The sooth-sayer in the market seems so sure of where they are."

"What did she say"? Nathan asks.

"Oh God, it's so horrible," sobs Isabella.

"Well, what? What did she be saying?"

"She said they were by a river. A place where people throw things away."

"You mean a garbage dump?"

"I not know, I don't . . . Oh God . . . leave me alone," chokes Isabella.

"Well what else? Tell me what she said." Nathan is irritated and wants to slap his wife, but somehow he knows this is the wrong time.

"Well, one other thing."

"What? *Goddamn it.*"

"She said that they were taken by the white devils. The ones raising crocodiles for pets."

"Well, that's it then. Isn't that crocodile place on the Monkey River just past the garbage dump?"

"Yes. So?"

"So? We have the answer. We know where they are."

"Should we send the police?" asks Isabella weakly.

"You know they are worthless. That they will not go out there."

"So what does that mean?"

"We need to find them ourselves," declares Nathan.

"They have to be somewhere. They must be where the witch says."

"Yes. They have to be somewhere," agrees Nathan. The two fall silent again. Isabella with her low sobs, Nathan studying the floor like it was a road map.

After a while, she looks directly into her husband's face and says, "What will you do to save the children?"

"Everything. I'll do everything."

"Will you save the children?"

"Yes. Yes, I'll save the children."

Isabella is slightly comforted by this. She sit up straight and looks around the dingy room with the spears of light coming through the thatch.

"You have to save my children. You have to keep us all safe. You will do that, won't you?"

"Yes. I'll do that. I'll make us safe."

"You better," is all she says, leaving the threat open-ended.

xii – Newspaper – September 3rd 2010

The *Amandala* newspaper has picked up on the story by now. This newspaper occupies a strange place in Belizean politics. Before the "revolution," which was really just the British leaving in disgust at the parasitic nature of the entire country's population, the paper supported every leftist and radical group who wanted to print a manifesto or make a call to rally in downtown. But it would also print the right wing bitching of government hawks who wanted to lock everybody up and arm the police with every weapon possible.

When the country was first founded in 1969, a white man led them to succession from the British. White men still ran the banks, the phone company, utilities, and fuel monopolies. That hierarchy gradually changed as the population became less oppressed by the white man, and greater prejudice and disrespect for white people grew. Gradually white people in top positions were forced out, and somebody's cousin or other family member was put in the position they knew nothing

about, nor had any intention of learning. As they realized the responsibilities of their new positions, the reality of graft, price fixing, and greedy rate changes swept the country. The services provided by any agency dropped to near zero, as nobody actually wanted to do any work. The cost of everything went up. The one thing that didn't change was the attitude of the newspaper.

The wise-ass who ran the paper was a white man named Andrew Kilter. A "take-no-bullshit Aussie" is how he described himself. His attitude was that of the greatest bull-shitter of them all. But not a liar. Kilter did not lie, nor would he tolerate lies. He would print lies, but usually within his own editorial, in the middle of the article explaining things like "how this [street hustling, child molesting, uneducated excuse for a] minister could ever have an original thought that was not dictated from some similar crook above him [referring to the prime minister], regarding the re-investment of education funds into subsidized Chinese oil exploration is beyond my moral meter." All sorts of articles were printed, including those that were speculation. "Pre-news," he called it.

So it was that the story of the Chok children came across his desk. "Well, who's looking for them?" he demanded to know. "Where did they disappear? Why has it been four days and there are no leads? What government agencies are involved here? None? Is it because of their Mayan ancestry? Of course it is. Dig out that old article on Mayan discrimination by government officials and we'll re-print it."

Kilter printed an appeal to the masses to find the children in the Sept 3rd newspaper :

In the Toledo District, two children age 11 and 9 have gone missing on August 31, 2010. At press time tonight, they have not been found. Not only have they not been found, but police have no idea where they may be, or who their abductor(s) are. A pseudo-search was conducted by Punta Gorda Police. They claim to have conducted an extensive search all around the country and particularly in the southern and western areas of Belize, but it was seen that they never got much further than Walooko's bar, where they discussed the case at length and what they were going to do about it—which was obviously nothing. One of the police even went as far as to call his cousin in Mexico, which makes this an international affair and eligible for additional funds. The Punta Gorda police will be able to use those funds for local interaction, such as coffee delivery and purchases from the tamale wagon.

The last time that the children were seen, they had been selling fruits for their family. They were last spotted on the Coastal Highway, across from the auto junkyard, on the same day that they went missing. Reportedly, they were attempting to catch a ride home, but who said that, and what the vehicle that picked them up looked like, no one can say.

The circumstances surrounding the missing children have been strange. The villagers of San Marcos were told by a "witch doctor" that the white couple who run the American Crocodile Education Sanctuary (ACES), had something to do with the children's disappearance. Some suspect that the children were abducted by the Americans to harvest their organs, as some rumors report that Rose Steinberg has a kidney condition that needs attention. The police have not bothered to question the Steinbergs, nor follow up on numerous rumors. At the time of this printing, the natives of San Marcos are frustrated and angry at the laziness of the officials and, if the issue of the missing children is not addressed, it is likely the people will take matters into their own hands.

It is typical of the corrupt police department to do as little as possible. In this case, the missing people are Mayan. The Garifuna tribe, of which the department is 100% composed, are deeply prejudiced against the Mayan people, considering them as little more than monkeys in the jungle. For this reason, there is no particular desire to "save" any of these people. Thus, their extensive and enduring stonewalling of the search process.

The police told Amandala that they would keep the case open until the children have been found. This will go into the drawer along with hundreds of other unsolved cases, never to be looked

at again by the lazy and corrupt Punta Gorda police department.

Andrew Kline was later fired by the state overseer after the newspaper was nationalized. That is a nice way of saying the government took over the newspaper to try and reduce the slander against its impeccable administration. An “information team” was created, to screen the new chief editor’s commentary, but the team rarely showed up for work and, when they did, it became apparent that reading and literacy was not in their skill set.

Thus Andrew’s apprentice, who was appointed chief editor as his replacement, continued to write scathing commentary and operate with impunity. Andrew went off to teach English in Cambodia where the prevailing wisdom is to engage in carnal activities with any foreigner from the Western world. This is in the hopes of being transplanted to America one day.

Thus Andrew is swimming in Asian love, teaching a few classes, and eating more Viagra than noodles. He feels he has attained Nirvana—and he has, by any Western male standard.

xiii. Aspen Wedding - December 2008

The spring wedding of Rose and JC is all the talk of Aspen. Daddy Steinberg is paying for everything, like reparations to an invaded country. The city park is festooned with party tents, bunting is strung everywhere, tables and linen, and a small army of servers, waiters, cook assistants, caterers with a truckload of food to set out, and a small nervous army of women running between everybody. Town dogs wander between the tables being set up, stopping to assess delicious smells drifting down from silver trays of fancy meats. Some are being petted, others are being cursed as they lay on paths or make a nuisance of themselves begging.

Soon a country rock band starts up on the stage and a crowd gathers. Others hurriedly put out chairs amid the gyrating crowd for the formal festivities. Some crowd control tape is stretched out to delineate where people should go. It looks cheap and tacky amid the other finery, like a wedding crime scene.

Rose is ecstatic on this day—her day—their wedding day. She wears a full-length brilliant white wedding dress, and is surrounded by six doting women in turquoise blue. They are all chattering away in half-sentences, each knowing the end words and competing for the next irrelevant statement.

“Do you want that curl of your hair over your ear? Shall we do something with—”

“Where’s the hand cream?”

“I just need—”

“Have you seen Molly’s kids who are holding the tails of the bridal dress? They are *sooo* cute.”

“Are those the shoes you’re going to wear? Tennis shoes?”

“No way. Do you?”

“What are the men doing?”

Nothing is really answered or paid attention to. Rose glows from all the attention around her. The maids dabbing a touch of mascara here and there on her face, or adjusting some fold on her dress. Rose asks simple yes or no questions, like: “Are we getting a ride to the park?”—and is answered with long and complicated explanations that forget to answer the question.

Frank is the best man. JC figures that it is because of him that his luck has changed so much for the better. It is because of him that he is launching off to crocodile heaven and marrying the princess at the same time. Frank’s daughter, the barista, is the maid of honor. The regulars of the Silverado Bar, affectionately known as bar flies, are all dressed up in smart-looking rented grey tuxedos. JC is wearing a jet-black tuxedo that is impeccably trimmed to his body. All together they look like bowling pins at a distance. A big white dog loves the groom too much, and is always

rubbing up against JC, who normally pets him. But now the animal leaves a small cloud of white hair on JC every time it brushes up against his wedding suit. JC's friends roll up his pant legs with duct tape to absorb the hair, while the others try to shoo the dog away.

Relatives and close friends all take their seats up front. Two cameramen flit about, snapping everything. Young women fuss with the flower arrangements. The back chairs are filled with clients of the head of the family. These people wear two thousand dollar suits. Some have turbans, and some are obviously African warlords with cheap military jackets festooned with medals. A large contingent of Asians also fill the back seats, clients from China, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other emerging dictatorships from Laos to Bangladesh.

Presently, the traditional music starts up and JC takes his place on the podium surrounded by partially sober Silverado barflies. As the music plays "Here Comes the Bride," Mr. Steinberg walks his virginal daughter to the stage.

The priest takes her hand, not missing the opportunity for a stroke over her bottom, under the guise of helping her onto the stage. There follows the standard Judeo-Christian litany of idealistic promises, such as "till death do us part," which should really be "till the money runs out." Then the pronouncement, the kiss, and the whoops of the assembled masses followed by a 21-gun salute arranged by the father. Then cake cutting and a general food frenzy, as there is enough food here to feed the Brazilian army. The Brazilian general in the back *wishes* he had the food for his rag-tag army. He's hoping to get a discount on 2000 M-16s by attending his benefactor's daughter's wedding.

A battered pickup truck pulls alongside the park, and an unshaven checkered-shirted idiot leans out the window and calls, "Screw her good. I did!" Those that hear him are aghast, which includes the father of the bride who is instantly enraged. A police car and a black sedan immediately take off after the driver, and in a block have the foul-mouthed local handcuffed, face down on the ground. The cops leave him there for the next two hours.

Dancing and drinking continues on for hours, some getting a little too lit up and falling into tables, and into others. A few of the Malaysians who are not used to drinking begin shouting it up in Malay language. No one can understand them, but they are still squeaky and annoying, so the patron has them dragged out of the park also.

Everyone is encouraged to write kind wishes in the guest book, and they do so with words like "Forever love," "The perfect future," and "May all your days be full of sunshine." Beside these words of unrealistic hope, Frank writes: "Love will make time pass, but time will always make love pass." He doesn't sign it, even though he doesn't have a munitions contract with the father.

The honeymoon is a quick four days in the Hawaii house. JC has been there and is not in any hurry to run into those who he has dealt with before—people who would recognize him as the flim-flam man that he is. Besides, the real honeymoon will be the trip to Belize. And, not just a trip, but a move for all of life. A new beginning.

Upon return from Hawaii, JC and Rose have a serious talk with Father Steinberg. For starters, their married name will be Steinberg, due to issues with inheritance and insurance coverage. The money to get them going in Belize is not an issue. Father deposits two million into Rose's bank account, and calls his friend Gottenberg, who owns the Scotia Bank in Belize, to set up an account there. There is usually an in-depth vetting for capital, collateral, and the international criminal records but, in this case, a platinum account is set up without ever filling out a form. What is needed in the way of "supplies," which is a euphemism for munitions and armaments, is discussed, as part of the land deal depends on it.

First off, the place needs rifles. Lots of them. The police department needs at least 200, and backup guns of at least another 100 or so. Of course the police chief will want to sell some for quick cash to other police thugs in nearby towns, and there are a few crack dealing gangsters who could benefit from the automatic rifles. Threatening, terrorizing, and intimidating is one thing with a



AMANDALA
"BELIZE'S LEADING NEWSPAPER"

[Home](#)
[Headline](#)
[Highlights](#)
[General](#)
[Features](#)
[Sports](#)
[Letters](#)
[Editorial](#)
[Publisher](#)
[Classifieds](#)
[RSS feed](#)

BENJAMIN, 11, AND ONELIA RASH, 9, STILL MISSING AFTER 4+ MONTHS

Features — 04 January 2011 — by Daniel Ortiz

It has been 4 months and several days since Onelia Rash, 9, and Benjamin Rash, 11, both of the San Marcos Village in the Toledo District, have gone missing, and at press time tonight, they have not been found.

Not only have they not been found, but police have no idea where they may be, or who their abductor(s) are.

The children went missing on August 31, 2010 and an extensive search was conducted all around the country and particularly in the southern and western areas of Belize. The police even went as far as to seek help from international police to help with their search.

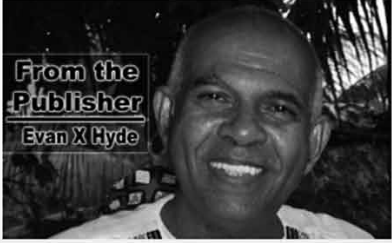
The last time that the children were seen, they had been selling fruits for their family. They were last spotted in the Cattle Landing Village on the same day that they went missing. Reportedly, they were attempting to catch a ride home.

The circumstances surrounding the missing Rash children have been strange. Villagers of the San Marcos Village, Toledo, burned down the American Crocodile Education Sanctuary (ACES), which was owned and managed by Vince and Cherie Chenot-Rose, an American couple living in Toledo for several years, because they were told by a "witchdoctor" that the couple had something to do with the children's disappearance.

The couple was outraged that the villagers would suspect them of kidnapping, and would go so far as to

SEARCH AMANDALA NEWS

From the Publisher
Evan X Hyde





AMANDALA
Editorial

machete, but much more convincing with a nasty-looking military carbine.

And this arrangement will keep the police department pursuing Rasta gangsters who perpetuate armed robberies and murders, and justify all the expenses and munitions buildup. That all this is for “safety” is said the world over by fascist warmongers.

So yeah, load up a container. Three hundred M-16 rifles with a thousand rounds of ammunition for each. When the Guatemalans come pouring over the border, everyone will want to be on full automatic. Tossing in a few boxes of grenades is always a good idea. It is said by wise men: “There are few problems on this earth that cannot be solved with the application of high explosives.” JC is very partial to the grenade launcher, particularly after watching the film *Terminator 2* where Arnold Schwarzenegger blows up the police cars. But these are in shorter supply, so only a few of these are thrown in, along with a few hundred rounds.

Then, of course, there are the accessories, knives, canteens, bullet belts, PC-1138s, a few TASERS for curiosity, and two cases of bandage field dressings.

As a special gifting to the police department, JC has 30 bullet-proof Kevlar vests added to the pile, these to be given out individually to the top brass of the department. Of course Mahee will want a top-of-the-line vest, as he likes to give his public speeches in such a thing to avoid dying in an assassination attempt.

With the list completed, Father Steinberg says he’ll have a container delivered here to Aspen with the goods, and other household fundamentals can be loaded in on top. Rose pores through an IKEA catalogue, picking out furniture left and right, then calculating the Amazon shipping. She is buying enough crap to fill two floors of a house in the future land, where no house exists. Yet.

JC is doing likewise with cheap tool catalogues of Chinese knockoffs, like Northern Tool, Western Hydraulics, and Harbor Freight. Ten thousand dollars of drills, table saws, wrenches, grinders, band saws, and dozens of other tools are selected. Probably don’t need that floor jack, but three of those chain hoists might come in handy. A couple of laser levels will be awesome, thinks JC, and the natives will bow down before the wonder of the white man.

Unfortunately, such manifest destiny ideals are no where near the truth. Everyone has seen everything before on the television. JC will be just another fool with twinkling lights and more phony white man magic.

xiv. Into Belize - January 2009

The Customs House seems chaotic at best and disorganized at a minimum. The guard in the tiny shack by the front gate is there for show only, as the person occupying it seems to have no function. Most of the time he lets everyone through, as he is propped up in his high chair, feet on the wall, trying to get comfortable enough to go to sleep. His feet keeps slipping, deep slumber is not attained, resulting in an irritable but sleepy gatekeeper. Sometimes he makes people wait, not for any noticeable reason, just wait—until he feels the person has suffered enough to respect his august position as the bastion of security for the Customs House.

JC doesn’t have to wait. He’s in the company of Mahee and a police lieutenant. Mahee has a bundle of papers which he raises like an Olympic torch as the three approach the guard shack. Without moving his head or other body part, the narcoleptic guard rolls his eyes at Mahee, uttering a resigned noise composed mostly of vowels, something like “eeoouuuoo.” Mahee responds in a like grunt, only with more force to the utterance, conveying power and importance.

They stride through to the main building, which is huge, being a quarter of a mile long and hundreds of feet wide. In the front corner is an office filled with papers in disarray, some candy wrappers, a few slimy banana leaves on the floor. Two desk phones sit in the rubble, and one rings with the anticipation of being answered. A cry in the dark, as no one occupies the office.

The three wander the cavernous building, with boxes and containers of all kinds stacked beside cleared aisles. After what seems like a mile of wandering around, they come across four men reclining on a shipment of mattresses that have been pulled out of the container.

"Hey, what up, fellas? Are ya all right?" asks Mahee. This is the question always asked here in Central America. No one really wants to know if you are all right. No one actually gives a shit. It is like the Northern question: "How are you?" Nobody wants to know that and, if you try to answer it, it is very bad etiquette.

"Yah, man. We be not vexed. Just be chilling on this mucho hard *trabajo* (work)," says one.

"Well, are you chilled enough to help us out?"

"Who send you? Frederick in office send you?"

"Nobody sent us. There was nobody around anywhere. We just found you here."

"You find us? What you want?"

"Well, some fucking help would be nice. Where is container #3487?" asks Mahee, looking down at his paperwork.

"Now, boss. You not get vexed. Chillax on that. We help you."

"OK. Not vexed. Just want to get going. Where is the guy in the office?"

"How we supposed to know that? In the banyo? Gone downtown for lunch? Off sleeping somewhere? *Mi don know nuttin. Mi no ina it.*"

"Well, what about that help?" With a huge groan, the worker slowly gets up. He motions to the others to get up also. He is annoyed to have their perpetual break disturbed.

"OK, boss. Let me see the paperwork. You have originals?" Mahee holds it in his grip, making no attempt to hand it over.

"Just show us where the container is. You don't need to see the papers. You can't read anyway."

The stevedore doesn't answer this, as Mahee has hit the nail on the head. The fellow just wanted the paperwork to look important and make claims that he understood what was going on. With another ten minutes of wandering around, they come across container #3487. The other workers break the seal and gyrate the levers, opening the huge box doors. M-16 bullets spill out on the ground from a ruptured container inside. The workers drop to their knees to pick up the cartridges while putting most of them in their pockets. These are worth a dollar apiece out on the street, as illegal ammo goes for a premium price. The police lieutenant also scoops up a few handfuls of bullets and stuffs them in his pockets.

The Customs guy shows up out of seemingly nowhere. He is bald and brown with very smooth facial features. From a side view, he looks like an oversized pinto bean. He grunts low, which everyone seems to understand except JC. He flips through the paperwork, though the customs pass is on the top and the police agent is frowning upon the proceedings.

"Everything seems in order," he says, and hands Mahee back the curling papers. No search of the container is conducted, no questions as to its contents. The container may have had smuggled Chinese slaves stuffed in the back, but it is all good to go on the word of the highest enforcer in the country, the Belize chief of police who has issued the pass on Mahee's behalf.

"Seal it up. Move it out of here," says the pinto bean. The workers scramble to get the doors closed while tossing fallen rounds back inside. After some hours of confusion and delay, the semi truck arrives and the forklift is brought out to load the forty-foot box. As the sun sets in a crimson blaze behind them, into the Maya Mountains, the truck and its contents are ready to roll south to Punta Gorda.

xv. Construction - April 2009

With much delay waiting for the truck, and then more delays along the highway south, JC is near the breaking point of frustration. First the driver has to stop at an overgrown shack thirty miles out of Belize City, ostensibly to “visit his cousin.” The true nature of the stop is to bring relief to the driver’s bowels. After what seems to JC like hours, but that was really only twenty minutes, the driver re-emerges from the shanty and climbs back to his seat.

“‘A little bit goes a long way,’ said the owl as it pooped over the precipice,” announces the trucker. The brilliant teeth in his full mirthful smile flash in the sun. JC says nothing, scowling into the dashboard, unamused.

In a hundred miles they come to a crossroads where a gas station sits in a surrounding of rampant growth. The growth is festooned with hundreds of plastic bags tarped in the twigs. Like a big sucking amoeba, it pulls the truck into the dirt parking area.

“Why the hell are we stopping here?” demands JC.

“Johnnycakes! Must have Johnnycakes,” declares the driver.

A Johnnycake turns out to be a sweet dough gob surrounding some mystery meat—chicken or dog, it doesn’t matter, just the hot grease and sugar. It doesn’t matter that it was made by the unwashed on the changing table next to the auto parts washing sink. A faint odor of cleaning fluid in each bite.

“Let’s get going,” scowls JC from his slumped down position in the seat. The operator is packing one Johnnycake in his mouth while juggling two others, the truck shifter, the steering wheel, and the blinker. One cake is mashed between his fingers and slimes the steering wheel as he swerves out into the narrow highway.

After the ten-hour drive south, it is the black of tropical night when they pull into Punta Gorda. JC is a vibrating mass of nerves after twenty near misses of pedestrians along the highway. The road walkers prefer to walk a foot in on the pavement, while the driver likes to stay in his lane at 60 MPH, passing the pedestrian within inches. Neither the driver nor the nearly road kill seem to notice the danger of the impending physics of impacting a 130-pound woman with a four-ton truck traveling at top velocity. $E = 1/2 mv^2$. Only two results will out come: the truck will barrel along, or the pedestrian will become a grease spot on the highway.

In the morning by the river that will soon be churning with crocodiles, a team of blundering local natives tackle the problem of getting the container off the truck. The discussion takes most of the morning with no movement of the goods. Just before noon, a few of them emerge from the surrounding forest with a long straight tree of a foot in diameter. With this, the container is pried up on the far end and rollers placed underneath. A team of four of them hang on the far end of the lever to push the steel box a few inches into the air. The weight on the fulcrum could be done with two Yankees and their carbohydrate corpulence, but it takes four of the natives.

When satisfied with the logs placed under the end of the container, it is tied up and secured back in the woods at the base of a Bali Wood tree. The truck driver attempts to drive out from underneath, but the rope breaks twice, and the left wheel digs into the soft river dirt. Ropes are replaced and rocks planted under the tires. The truck lurches forward and the back end of the box crashes to the ground. A huge rumbling is heard as the interior contents slide in confusion. As the truck pulls forward, the container end approaches the truck end and the impending crash nears when it falls to the ground.

JC runs over shouting and waving his arms. “The shit in there could blow up! What the fuck are you doing? You’re trashing everything inside.”

“We’re getting it off, boss,” proudly states one of the workers.

“You’re destroying the contents, you fucking morons. Where’s the dunnage under this end?”

Stop! Stop, you bastards!”

The driver hears this as an urgency to get the job done, and stomps on the truck’s gas pedal. With a piercing shriek, the metal drags across the truck bed and the box falls off the end, ripping off the bumper and landing with a jarring thud. The interior contents can be heard rattling for a few seconds as the kinetic scramble inside settles down.

“You fucking dickhead idiots! *What the fuck have you done?* Ya fucked up the truck. *Ya fucked up everything in the container!* Why the hell aren’t any of you fools killed? I can help with that!” He feigns lunging at one of the idle workers, his eyes bulging, who springs back in alarm.

“But, boss. We got de box down,” he says with pride. JC stomps away, a dark scowl on his face.

With the truck, minus the bumper, JC heads into town the next day for lumber. The lumber store is on the edge of town and run by an enterprising Guatemalan woman. She owns a forest of pine some dozens of miles north, where a small army chops the trees and runs them through a rudimentary sawmill to create dimensional lumber. A 2x4 is actually two inches by four inches, completely soaked through with sap and water. A ten-foot stick weighs a hundred pounds. As heavy as stone. 2x6s and 2x10s require a small team to load them.

Nancy, the proprietor, has a half a dozen workers loading and unloading the *madera*, as they call wood in Spanish. These workers live in shanties all around the edge of the property made of discarded sheet metal and tossed pieces of warped lumber. Nancy yells out into the yard: “*Ven a trabajar moviendo la madera para el Americano . . . aquí . . . ahora.*” Basically: come work moving the wood for the American . . . here . . . now.”

Two of the shacks rustle and disgorge a couple of grungy-looking guys, who mosey into the yard with the slowest foot dragging possible.

“*Aquí . . . ahora!*” shouts Nancy in irritation.

The workers are a head shorter than Nancy, she being on par with the greatest visions of beautiful Amazonian women. Her face is beautifully smooth with cute features, but mature. A sly look of sexual energy emanates from her. Nancy has a perfectly formed body; although of great size, it is graced with seductive hips and an ample bosom. This is barely contained in a skimpy shirt from where half of the bronze mounds protrude.

Nancy is a beauty by any world standard. Smart and industrious also. Large and proportionate, she twists any passing head with wonder. In person, she is a face talker to specific customers, such as rich white North Americans. To JC, she seems dipped in sexual pheromones; he cannot help himself from moving close to her to explain his needs, the tips of her pendulant breasts just grazing his shirt. Language comes with difficulty to JC, as he tries to explain how many boards he wants, but is handicapped by his lower brain draining all the blood out of his skull. Nancy speaks perfect English, but prefers to talk in a thick accent, keeping JC off balance.

“You want *eeeigh madera*,” she says sweetly, her voice cooing beside his ear.

“Eighty. I need eighty 2x4s.”

“*Eiggghthy 2x4s. Yes, We have. Amilio! Git da eeggithy 2x4!*” she shouts at the diminutive grubby assistants. “*Ahora. Más rápido!*”

JC stands beside the Amazonian, inhaling her effusive sex, marveling at her tight pants and overreaching breasts. He is weak in the knees, but stands tall next to the competent proprietor. In a long and clumsy process of loading the truck that takes an hour, JC shops for nails and connectors inside with Nancy. She knows every product she has intimately, and continues to sell JC one thing after another. A new hammer, a square, a hand saw, all the while leaning into and over him, keeping him in a bubble of delirious sexual energy. If JC was ever out to save a few dollars in Northern frugality, he is out of his element here, buying everything she suggests without question, least he deflate the frothing fantasy of romance in the charged flirtatious atmosphere.

Back at the build site, the “help” is lounging around in the shade, apparently perfectly satisfied to sleep the entire day unless roused. JC does so with much yelling and curses unknown to these locals.

“Ya goddamned socio-economic disasters, rejects from the encephalographically challenged pack of succubuses in a financial swamp. A work ethic on par with drugged three-toed sloths. You are worthless! And you smell!”

The crew is not sure what all this means, except that the boss is pissed. But then he is always pissed and all that really matters is the cash at the end of the day. The actual job is mostly irrelevant, as what the white man wants to do is crazy. No one has ever built anything like this.

The crew was supposed to be leveling ground in preparation for the foundation, but aside from stringing fishing line around the perimeter, little has been done. An obvious hump in the intended flat surface is ignored. The workers are unable to understand what is desired, or they have no desire to do what is intended.

JC wades into the clearing, snarling his foot in the fishing line perimeter. Enraged afresh, he curses the mound of unexcavated dirt. The crew slowly swings their heads around with cow-like eyes and languid body language to the demonstratively shouted *‘Aquí! Cavar. Necesario cavar!’* (Here! Dig. I need to dig!).

JC grabs a shovel and begins digging in a storm of energy and mumbled curses. The crew reluctantly pick up shovels and join the maniac white man, whittling on the jungle dirt.

In a week, the foundations are finished and the floor is roughed in. No one seems to know how a tape measure works, so every fine detail falls to JC. He is constantly running from one end to the other to make sure boards are not cut too short, or nailed properly but in the wrong place. The workers seem to have no regard for what they are making, but make a fine show of staying busy under the disgruntled eye of the boss. They nail anything to anything, without a thought to the plan. So much of JC’s work is having them dismantle what they did and re-do it. Without the benefit of new instructions from the harried *jefe* [boss], the same mistakes are made again and again, adding to JC’s fury.

Walls are somehow erected over the next week and details of the roof, windows, and doors confront the project. Although JC’s skills in carpentry are minimal in most regards, he is, as always, the expert in such matters. JC attempts to be more explanatory to his top “carpenters,” showing them the proper way to hang a door with shims and batting, going so far as to try and teach them triangulation to make things square.

At first the doorway is crooked and the door will not shut. JC rips everything to the floor, cursing his usual epithets. Then he slowly explains the procedure’s numerous details to one of the carpenters, quickly beyond his comprehension. Satisfied with his fine construction mentoring, the boss darts off to arrest the next problem in the making. When he returns in an hour, the doorframe has been reassembled in the same crooked manner as before with none of the adjustments described.

“What the fuck is this? This is the same shit you were supposed to fix!”

“Got door fixed, boss. Quick thing. All good now.”

“Good? The fucking hell it’s good. This is shit work. The door won’t even close. What the hell do you think you are doing?”

“Making the grand *casa* for de boss, *jefe*.”

“I’m not paying you idiots for this garbage. This waste of materials. I’m not paying any of you for fucking around. Pulling your pencil dicks. Forget it!”

“Boss, be not so vexed. We fix. We are top carpenters in our village,” proudly announces the door builder.

“We’re not making thatched huts here. We are not using chicken guts to tie this together. This is refined skilled craftsmanship from the North. A stickhouse where the rats don’t run rampant,

as they do in your shitty mud hovels. Get with the fucking program or I'll fire all of you."

"You not pay us, *jefe*?"

"I'm not paying you a fucking nickel until you do some real and constructive work here. Pay attention and work with the detail in mind. You don't have to be so *entirely* stupid. Use your fucking brain, if you have one." JC scolds the workers like schoolchildren. The labor doesn't know what a nickel is, as there is no such coin in Belize, but they get the idea that . . . something that they feel is their right . . . their pay . . . will be withheld from them.

There is no argument, even if there is no understanding, as these are a meek people, particularly in the face of a loco white man that outweighs them by twice as much, and holds the strings to the purse. The house building and ancillary buildings takes JC four times as long as expected, with himself doing most of the work. It is ten months before things start to look as they should, before JC can relax a little and consider how to get a gaggle of crocodiles to his sanctuary.

Mahee comes by in a rusted Chevy LUV overflowing with police. These are all part of the same protection deal with the government, and are all just gangsters with semi-offical titles. The crew of officials takes some SKS Chinese assault rifles and a few pistols for the top brass. JC stands next to their puny truck and gives each a Kevlar bulletproof vest, endearing the greedy thugs to his everlasting wonderful whiteness. Or so he thinks.

One of the crew grabs a huge weapon out of the back of the container in absolute bewilderment.

"No. No. Not that one. That one stays. Put it back," demands JC to the fiddling police officer who has never seen any gun near the size.

"What the hell is that?" asks Mahee of JC.

"It's a big gun."

"No shit. What does it shoot?"

JC gets close to the questioner and whispers in his ear.

"It's a grenade launcher."

Mahee retreats in feigned fear and real admiration.

"Wow. We'll kick some Guatemalan ass with that!"

"No, we won't," is all JC says. "This is only for personal home protection."

Mahee wonders what kind of protection can be had from a gun that blows everything all to hell and gone. What's left to protect?

To be continued in Cenacle | 109 | October 2019

* * * * *



Jimmy Heffernan**Time Asymmetric**

The dogma goes thus
Effect after cause
It would be a fuss
To break such firm laws

But time is symmetric
Or so they have told us
Mathematics eclectic
Would therefore not scold us

Were we to presume
That effect could precede
Cause—can we assume
That Nature would concede?

The future could reach
Back into the past
Would this be a breach
Of a universe vast?

Perhaps multiversal
Principles inhere thusly
A stark role-reversal
What about causes must be?

If indeed the whole concept
Is rough and provisional
Then perhaps such a precept
Is at most conditional

* * *

Skiing

Down the chute
Double-black
Stressing boot
Vertical attack

Regulator wide
Glide on over
Hell of a ride
Quickly over

The Cirque stretching
Like a crescent moon
No edge catching
On this white dune

The Primrose Path
Invites who dare
The devil's laugh
Moguls to bear

Finesse or speed
The main duality
The slope to read
A pure reality

Gravity fades
Floating, gliding
In this frozen glade
Nature abiding

* * *

The Soft Parade

*"The soft parade has now begun;
Listen to the engines hum . . . "*
—*The Doors, 1969.*

If we have wasted silent dawns
We hope that day's not done

All we do, build for the grave
Listen to the latest knave
What a tragic history
We need another wave

People out to have some fun
Deliver up some other one
Essentially, that's the result
Yet we mustn't crawl, but run

So there's the proposition
We are far from in position
The clock is ticking, almost dead
Life isn't an audition

Defending this place—getting tough
The world's a place that's kind of rough
If we could stop this waste of time
Perhaps we'd live enough

But as it is, we've built a mistake
And one just gets but just one take
The parade is holding, must restart
Or emptiness our fate

* * *

Fleeting

The tragedy of life, it seems
Is that it's mostly boring
At its peaks it surely gleams
But mostly, we're abhorring.

Ordinariness is king
And tedium its queen
Magic fleeting, feel the sting
Reality is mean.

* * * * *



Michael Pollan



My Adventures with the Trip Doctors

[Essay]

Published May 15, 2018 by the *New York Times Magazine*

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/05/15/magazine/health-issue-my-adventures-with-hallucinogenic-drugs-medicine.html>

i.

My first psilocybin journey began around an altar in the middle of a second-story loft in a suburb of a small city on the Eastern Seaboard. On this adventure I would have a guide, a therapist who, like an unknown number of other therapists administering psychedelics in America today, must work underground because these drugs are illegal. Seated across the altar from me, Mary (who asked that I use a nickname because of the work she does) began by reciting, with her eyes closed, a long and elaborate prayer derived from various Native American traditions. My eyes were closed, too, but now and again I couldn't resist peeking out for a glance at my guide: a woman in her 60s, with long blond hair parted in the middle, and high cheekbones that I mention only because they would, in a few hours, figure in her miraculous transformation into a Mexican Indian.

I also stole a few glances at the scene: the squash-colored loft with its potted plants and symbols of fertility and female power; the embroidered purple fabric from Peru that covered the altar; and the collection of items arrayed across it, including an amethyst in the shape of a heart, a purple crystal holding a candle, a bowl containing a few squares of dark chocolate, the personal "sacred item" that Mary had asked me to bring (a little bronze Buddha a friend brought me from Tibet) and, set squarely before me, an antique plate holding the biggest psilocybin mushroom I had ever seen.

The crowded altar also held a branch of sage and a stub of palo santo, a fragrant wood that some Indians in South America burn ceremonially, and the jet-black wing of a crow. At various points in the ceremony, Mary would light the sage and the palo santo, using the crow's wing to "smudge" me with the smoke—guiding the spirits through the space around my head.

The whole scene must sound ridiculously hokey, not to mention laced with cultural appropriation, yet the conviction Mary brought to the ceremony, together with the aromas of the burning plants and the spooky sound of the wing pulsing the air around my head—plus my own nervousness about the journey in store—cast a spell that allowed me to suspend my disbelief. Mary trained under one of the revered "elders" in the psychedelic community, an 80-something psychologist who was one of Timothy Leary's graduate students at Harvard. But I think it was her manner, her sobriety, and her evident compassion that made me feel sufficiently comfortable to entrust her with, well, my mind.

As a child growing up outside Providence, Rhode Island, Mary was an enthusiastic Catholic, she says, "until I realized I was a girl"—a fact that would disqualify her from ever performing the rituals she cherished. Her religiosity lay dormant until, in college, friends gave her a pot of honey infused with psilocybin for her birthday; a few spoonfuls of the honey "catapulted me into a huge change," she told me the first time we met. The reawakening of her spiritual life led her onto the path of Tibetan Buddhism, and eventually to take the vow of an initiate: "To assist all sentient beings in their awakening and enlightenment." Which is still my vocation.

And now seated before her in her treatment room was me, the next sentient being on deck, hoping to be awakened. She asked me to state my intention, and I answered: to learn whatever the “mushroom teachers,” as she called them, could teach me about myself, and about the nature of consciousness.

ii.

Psychedelic therapy, whether for the treatment of psychological problems or as a means of facilitating self-exploration and spiritual growth, is undergoing a renaissance in America. This is happening both underground, where the community of guides like Mary is thriving, and aboveground, at institutions like Johns Hopkins University, New York University (NYU) and University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), where a series of drug trials have yielded notably promising results.

I call it a renaissance because much of the work represents a revival of research done in the 1950s and 1960s, when psychedelic drugs like LSD and psilocybin were closely studied and regarded by many in the mental health community as breakthroughs in psychopharmacology. Before 1965, there were more than 1,000 published studies of psychedelics involving some 40,000 volunteers and six international conferences dedicated to the drugs. Psychiatrists were using small doses of LSD to help their patients access repressed material (actor Cary Grant, after 60 such sessions, famously declared himself “born again”); other therapists administered bigger so-called psychedelic doses to treat alcoholism, depression, personality disorders, and the fear and anxiety of patients with life-threatening illnesses confronting their mortality.

That all changed in the mid-’60s, after Dr. Timothy Leary, the Harvard psychologist and lecturer turned psychedelic evangelist, began encouraging kids to “turn on, tune in and drop out.” Silly as that slogan sounds to our ears, a great many kids appeared to follow his counsel, much to the horror of their parents. The drugs fell into the eager embrace of a rising counterculture, influencing everything from styles of music and dress to cultural mores and, many thought, inspired the questioning of adult authority that marked the “generation gap.” “The kids who take LSD aren’t going to fight your wars,” Dr. Leary famously claimed.

In 1971, President Nixon called Dr. Leary, who by then had been drummed out of academia and chased by the law, “the most dangerous man in America.” That same year, the Controlled Substances Act took effect; it classified LSD and psilocybin as Schedule 1 drugs, meaning that they had a high potential for abuse and no accepted medical use; possession or sale became a federal crime. Funding for research dried up, and the legal practice of psychedelic therapy came to a halt.

But, beginning in the 1990s, a new generation of academics quietly began doing psychedelics research again, much of it focusing on people with cancer. Since then, several dozen studies using psychedelic compounds have been completed or are underway. In a pair of Phase 2 psilocybin trials at Hopkins and NYU, 80 cancer patients, many of them terminal, received a moderately high dose of psilocybin in a session guided by two therapists.

Patients described going into their body and confronting their cancer or their fear of death; many had mystical experiences that gave them a glimpse of an afterlife or made them feel connected to nature or the universe in a way they found comforting. The studies, which were published in *The Journal of Psychopharmacology* in December 2016, reported that 80 percent of the Hopkins volunteers had clinically significant reductions in standard measurements of depression and anxiety, improvements that endured for at least six months.

Other, smaller studies of psilocybin have found that one, two, or three guided sessions can help alcoholics and smokers overcome their addictions; in the case of 15 smokers treated in a 2014 pilot study at Hopkins, 80 percent of the volunteers were no longer smoking six months after their first psychedelic session, a figure that fell to 67 percent after a year—which is far better than the best treatment currently available. The psychedelic experience appears to give people a radical new

perspective on their own lives, making possible a shift in worldview and priorities that allows them to let go of old habits.

Yet researchers believe it is not the molecules by themselves that can help patients change their minds. The role of the guide is crucial. People under the influence of psychedelics are extraordinarily suggestible—“think of placebos on rocket boosters,” a Hopkins researcher told me—with the psychedelic experience profoundly affected by “set” and “setting”—that is, by the volunteer’s interior and exterior environments.

For that reason, treatment sessions typically take place in a cozy room, and always in the company of trained guides. The guides prepare volunteers for the journey to come, sit by them for the duration and then, usually on the day after a session, help them to “integrate,” or make sense of, the experience and put it to good use in changing their lives. The work is typically referred to as “psychedelic therapy,” but it would be more accurate to call it “psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy.”

Though the university researchers seldom talk about it, much of the collective wisdom regarding how best to guide a psychedelic session resides in the heads of underground guides like Mary. These are the people who, in many cases, continued to do this work illicitly, long after the backlash against psychedelics during the 1960s ended most research and therapy. But their role in the current renaissance is an awkward one, as I discovered early this spring when I sat in on the nation’s first certificate program for aspiring psychedelic guides.

iii.

On a Friday afternoon in late March, 64 health care professionals of various stripes—doctors, therapists, nurses, counselors, and naturopaths—gathered in Namaste Hall at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS), a school of psychology and social sciences in San Francisco, to begin their training to become legal psychedelic therapists. To be admitted to the program, an applicant must have a professional medical or therapy license of some kind, and most of the trainees—whose average age looked to be about 45, and whose number included nine psychologists, nine psychiatrists, and four oncologists—had enrolled in this certificate program in the belief that psychedelic drugs like psilocybin and MDMA, administered with the proper support and guidance, hold the potential to revolutionize mental health treatment. The career path might not be clear or straight yet, but these people want to be ready to lead that revolution when it arrives—which may be sooner than we think.

It quickly became clear that the reason most of the people in the room were willing to devote the time (five weekends and one full week over nine months) and the money (\$7,800) to be certified as a graduate of the program is that they’d been persuaded—often by personal experience—of the therapeutic potential of these compounds. As Manish Agrawal, a rugged 48-year-old oncologist who practices in Maryland, told me, with a sardonic lift of an eyebrow, “You don’t do something like this because you read a magazine article.”

The drugs at the center of the therapy being taught—still classified by the government as Schedule 1—cannot be used in the training, a limitation that both students and instructors lamented (CIIS plans to petition the FDA for permission to give psilocybin and MDMA to students in future trainings). And while most of the faculty was drawn from the ranks of therapists who work in sanctioned clinical trials of psilocybin and MDMA, because so much of the relevant experience belongs to guides who have been working underground, the program draws on the wisdom of these people too. Though the program’s explicitly stated intention is to train guides to work in the world of legal psychedelic therapy, that world (apart from the handful of clinical trials) doesn’t quite exist yet, while the psychedelic underground beckons right now.

Janis Phelps, a psychologist and CIIS administrator who established and directs the program, forthrightly confronted the issue in her introductory remarks to the class Friday evening. “We are training you to be aboveground therapists,” she emphasized. “If you are thinking of working underground”—



she later told me a strenuous effort had been made to weed out such people—“you need to think about that. Because we want you to be aboveground, FDA-approved therapists. Everyone engaged in this research is squeaky clean.”

She looked out over the room of aspiring guides. “So I invite you into the tensions of the field as it now exists.”

iv.

Bill Richards, clinical director of the psychedelics-research program at Johns Hopkins and the author of *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences*, is one of the few surviving links between the first and second waves of sanctioned psychedelic research in America. A jovial, goateed psychologist in his 70s with an infectious cackle, Richards led off the weekend’s instruction on Saturday morning.

Working at the Maryland Psychiatric Research Center at Spring Grove in the 1970s, Richards and his colleagues successfully treated alcoholics, cancer patients, and people suffering from depression with LSD until 1976, when research at the center shut down. “How can this ever have been illegal?” Richards likes to say. “It’s as if we made entering Gothic cathedrals illegal, or museums, or sunsets!”

When research with psilocybin resumed in the 1990s, Johns Hopkins recruited Richards because of his long experience guiding patients during a high-dose psychedelic experience. Today’s researchers work with psilocybin and MDMA because a session tends to be shorter than with LSD, and because the words carry much less political baggage.

Since the ’60s, LSD has been associated in the public mind with the counterculture and with stories, true or not, of people jumping off buildings thinking they could fly, blinding themselves by staring at the sun or landing themselves in the emergency room after psychotic episodes. MDMA and psilocybin are less well known and don’t seem to have the same associations (Also, the fact that psilocybin is “natural”—derived from a mushroom—seems to count in its favor). Richards has trained many of the guides now working in clinical trials not only at Hopkins but also at NYU and at Imperial College London.

In his PowerPoint presentation, Richards laid out what have become the standard protocol for aboveground psychedelic therapy, and the role of the guide at each of the three principal stages of “the journey.” First comes a series of preparation sessions, in which volunteers are told what to expect, asked to set an intention (to quit smoking, say, or confront their fear of death) and offered a set of “flight instructions” for the journey ahead. These generally advise surrendering to the experience, whatever it brings and however disturbing it might become. (“Trust, let go, be open” is one mantra he recommends or, borrowing from Dr. Leary, Dr. Richard Alpert, and Dr. Ralph Metzner’s 1964 book *The Psychedelic Experience*, “Turn off your mind, relax and float downstream.”) If you feel as if you are “dying, melting, dissolving, exploding, going crazy, etc.—go ahead.”

Richards stressed how important it is for the guide to quickly establish a rapport with volunteers, so that during the session “they can let themselves ‘die’ or go crazy—that requires an awful lot of trust!” Because the patients’ ego defenses are likely to be disabled by the drug, it’s crucial that they feel safe.

The second stage is the journey itself. Richards showed a slide of the Hopkins treatment room, decorated to look like the office of a psychiatrist with an interest in Eastern religion and indigenous peoples, with shelves holding large-format art books and spiritual tchotchkes, including a Buddha and a large ceramic mushroom. The volunteer stretches out on a couch and puts on eyeshades and headphones to encourage an inward journey free of distraction. Richards has put together a playlist consisting mainly of classical compositions arranged to support and structure the experience.

Two guides, typically one male, the other female, sit with the volunteer for the duration but say very little, allowing the journey to unfold according to its own logic. Mostly the guide is present to offer a comforting hand if the journeyer is struggling, jot down anything he or she has to say, and

generally keep an eye on the volunteer's physical well-being while he or she is roaming his or her psychic landscape.

Because it is the drug and the mind that drive the journey, and not the therapist, the guide's role calls for an unusual degree of humility, restraint, and patience—the sessions can last for hours. No snoozing or checking of email; meditating, however, is OK. Richards describes the session as the “*pièce de résistance*” of the work, “in which you're focused intensely on one human being as if that's all that exists in the world. It's a great way to get exhausted!”

The last stage is integration, which typically takes place the following day. Here the guide helps the volunteer make sense of what can be a confusing and inchoate experience, underscoring important themes, and offering ideas on how to apply whatever insights may have emerged to the conduct of the volunteer's life. The challenge, as Richards put it, is to help the volunteer transform “flashes of illumination” (he's quoting Huston Smith, the late scholar of religion) experienced during the trip “into abiding light”—a new, more constructive way to regard your self and situation.

It is sometimes said that in the last few decades psychiatry went from being brainless—relying on talk therapies oblivious to neurobiology—to being mindless—relying on drugs, with little attention to the contents of consciousness. If psychedelic-assisted therapy proves as effective as early trials suggest it might, it will be because it succeeds in rejoining the brain and the mind in a radical new therapeutic paradigm: using not just a chemical but the powerful mental experience it can occasion, given the proper support, to disrupt destructive patterns of thought and behavior.

Such a new approach couldn't come at a better time for a field that is “broken,” as Tom Insel, head of the National Institute of Mental Health until 2015, told me bluntly. Rates of depression (now the leading cause of disability worldwide, according to the World Health Organization) and suicide are climbing; addictive behavior is rampant. Little has changed, meanwhile, in psychopharmacology since the introduction of SSRI antidepressants in the late 1980s.

This may explain why prominent figures in the psychiatric establishment are voicing support for psychedelic research. Addressing a conference on psychedelic science in Oakland last spring, Insel and Paul Summergrad, a former president of the American Psychiatric Association, offered encouragement to the psychedelic researchers in the audience, with Insel singling out for praise “the novel approach here”—the way the psychedelic therapist combines pharmacology and psychotherapy to create a single transformative experience.

∇

Psychedelic therapy, as the idea is now understood, was developed by a group of researchers working in Saskatchewan in the mid-1950s, including the psychiatrists Abram Hoffer, Humphry Osmond (who, in 1957, coined the word “psychedelic,” which loosely translates from the Greek as “mind manifesting”), and their frequent collaborator and muse, a brilliant amateur therapist named Al Hubbard. After both conducting and participating in a great many mescaline and LSD sessions—at the time it was routine for scientists to test drugs on themselves, the researchers observed how variable the experience could be, depending on circumstance and mind-set.

In those days, no one knew how best to administer these strange new compounds; the need for a guide wasn't immediately apparent. Some early scientists in white coats bearing clipboards dosed volunteers in a hospital room with white walls and fluorescent lights. Very often, the volunteers would then be left alone. Researchers didn't yet understand that the psychedelic experience is not foreordained by the chemical but rather is “constructed” in the mind from an unpredictable mix of expectation, memory, the contents of the unconscious, and a variety of environmental factors.

Beginning in the late 1950s, as the researchers began to better grasp the many factors at work, they began to work more consciously with *set and setting* (though this phrase wasn't coined until 1961, by Dr. Leary), bringing music and images into a treatment room they made comfy, and emphasizing

the role of a guide.

Shamans have known for thousands of years that a person in the depths of a trance, or under the influence of a hallucinogenic plant like ayahuasca or peyote, can be readily manipulated with the help of certain words, cues, special objects, or music. They understand intuitively how the suggestibility of the human mind during an altered state of consciousness can be harnessed as an important resource for healing—for breaking destructive patterns of thought and proposing new perspective in their place. One of the Canadian group's key contributions to psychedelic therapy was to introduce the tried-and-true tools of shamanism, or rather the Westernized version of it that, to one degree or another, most of today's psychedelic guides still practice, whether working aboveground or below—though the tools of shamanism play a larger role in the underground.

Before my own psychedelic journey, I met and interviewed more than a dozen such guides, many of them trained by the therapists who were using psychedelics in their practices before they became illegal and decided that, rather than give up a tool they had found to be effective, they would continue to work underground, at substantial personal risk. One such therapist was a Bay Area Jungian psychologist named Leo Zeff, perhaps the best-known underground guide of his generation; before his death in 1988, he claimed to have “tripped” 3,000 patients and helped train 150 underground guides, many of whom are still at work.

My travels through the psychedelic therapy underground convinced me that while the community is obviously far-flung and heterogeneous, and has its complement of charlatans, many guides are professionals who share an approach and even a code of conduct.¹

Relative to the way guiding is practiced in the aboveground clinical trials (and taught at CIIS), the underground guides I interviewed, and eventually worked with, take a somewhat more active role in choreographing the experience, bringing into the “ceremony,” as they're apt to call it, such traditional elements as incense, tobacco and sage smoke, rattles, the singing of *icaros* (sacred songs), and chanting of prayers.

“There are now two distinct lineages,” I was told by an underground guide with 35 years of experience, who asked me to use a family name, Michelle. “In the Western medical model, the guide is taught never to ‘get ahead of the medicine’”—that is, he or she aims for a noninterventionist, back-seat role during the session and, because these are foremost scientific trials, sticks to a standardized protocol in order to minimize the number of experimental variables in play. Many underground guides find this needlessly confining.

“The journey should be customized to each person,” Michelle said. “The idea of playing the same music for everyone makes absolutely no sense.” Instead, she might choose a comforting piece to support someone struggling with a challenging trip, or put on something “chaotic and disassembling” to help break down another client's defenses. “A healer is not just a sitter. She does stuff.”

Many underground guides have traveled extensively in Mexico, Brazil, and Peru to study with traditional healers; Michelle believes psychedelic therapy still has much to learn from the “earth peoples” who have made use of psychedelic plants and fungi in their healing ceremonies for thousands of years. She feels the work she does offers more scope for “creativity and intuition” than the rote clinical techniques being taught aboveground allow.

vi.

I would have preferred to have my own guided psilocybin session aboveground in the reassuring confines of a medical institution, but the teams at Hopkins and NYU weren't currently working with so-called healthy normals (do I flatter myself?)—and I could lay claim to none of the serious mental problems they were studying. I wasn't trying to fix anything big—not that there wasn't room for improvement.

Like many people in late middle age, I had developed a set of fairly dependable mental

algorithms for navigating whatever life threw at me, and while these are undeniably useful tools for coping with everyday life and getting things done, they leave little space for surprise or wonder or change. After interviewing several dozen people who had undergone psychedelic therapy, I envied the radical new perspectives they had achieved. I also wasn't sure I'd ever had a spiritual experience, and time was growing short. The idea of "shaking the snow globe" of my mental life, as one psychedelic researcher put it, had come to seem appealing.

In Mary, I had found an underground guide with whom I felt comfortable. Mary's approach, in terms of dosage, also happened to approximate the aboveground experience, though she worked with whole mushrooms rather than the capsules of synthetic psilocybin used in the university trials.

"The mushroom teachers help us to see who we really are," Mary said, as we sat across the altar from each other. "They bring us back to our soul's purpose for being here in this lifetime." By now I was inured to the New Age lingo. I was also impressed, and reassured, by Mary's professionalism. In addition to having me consent to the standard "agreements" (bowing to her authority for the duration; remaining in the room until she gave me permission to leave; no sexual contact), she had me fill out a detailed medical form, a legal release, and an autobiographical questionnaire that resulted in 15 pages of writing it took me the better part of a day to complete. All of which made me feel I was in good hands, even when those hands were flapping a crow's wing around my head.

On my tongue, the dried mushroom, which was easily four inches long and had a cap the size of a golf ball, was as parched as desert sand and tasted like earth-flavored cardboard, but alternating each bite with a nibble of chocolate helped me get it down. We chatted quietly for 20 minutes or so before Mary noticed that my face was flushed and suggested I lie down and put on eyeshades.

As soon as Mary put on the first song—an insipid New Age composition by someone named Thierry David (an artist thrice nominated, I later learned, in *Zone Music Reporter's* category of Best Chill/Groove Album)—I was immediately propelled into a nighttime urban landscape that appeared to have been generated by a computer.

I was experiencing synesthesia, in which one sense gets cross-wired with another, so that sound was creating visual space, and what I took to be David's electronica conjured a depopulated futuristic city, with each note giving rise to another soft black stalagmite or stalactite that together resembled the high-relief soundproofing foam used to line recording studios.

I moved effortlessly through this digital nightscape as if within the confines of a dystopian video game. Though the place wasn't particularly frightening and had a certain sleek beauty, I hated being in it, and wished to be somewhere else, but it went on and on, seemingly forever. I asked Mary to please play something else, and though the mood shifted with the new music, I was still stuck—trapped—in this sunless computer world. *Why, oh why, couldn't I be outside?*

This could easily take a terrifying turn, it occurred to me, and with that a dim tide of anxiety began to build. Recalling the flight instructions, I told myself there was nothing to do but let go and surrender to the experience. *Relax and float downstream.* I realized I was no longer captain of my attention, able to direct it this way or that and change the mental channel at will. No, this was more like being strapped into the front car of a cosmic roller coaster, its heedless headlong trajectory determining moment by moment what would appear in my field of awareness.

Actually, that's not entirely true: All I had to do was remove my eyeshades and reality, or at least something loosely based on it, would re-present itself. This is what I now did, partly to satisfy myself that the world still existed, but mostly because I badly needed to pee. Sunlight and color flooded my eyes, and I drank it in greedily, surveying the room for the welcome signifiers of non-digital reality: *Walls! Windows! Plants!*

But this reality appeared in a new aspect: jeweled with morning light, every beam of it addressed to my eyes. I got up carefully from the mattress, and Mary took me by the elbow, geriatrically, and together we made the long journey across the loft to the bathroom. I avoided looking at her, uncertain what I might see in her face, or betray in mine.

After producing the most spectacular crop of diamonds, I made my unsteady way back to the mattress and lay down. Mary, speaking softly, asked if I wanted “a booster.” I sat up to receive another mushroom, for a total of about four grams. Mary was kneeling next to me, the mushroom in her upturned palm, and when I finally looked up into her face, I saw she had turned into María Sabina, the Mazatec curandera whom I had read about.

Sixty years ago, Sabina gave psilocybin mushrooms to R. Gordon Wasson, supposedly the first Westerner to try them, in a dirt-floored basement of a thatch-roofed house in the remote mountains of Oaxaca in central Mexico. Mary’s hair was now black; her face, stretched taut over its high cheekbones, was anciently weathered; and she was wearing a simple white peasant dress. I took the desiccated mushroom from the woman’s wrinkled brown hand and looked away as I chewed; I didn’t think I should tell Mary what had happened to her.

When I put my eyeshades back on and lay down, I was disappointed to find myself back in computer world, but something had changed, no doubt a result of the stepped-up dose. Whereas before I navigated this landscape as myself, taking in the scene from a perspective recognizable as my own, with my attitudes intact (highly critical of the music, for instance), now I watched as that familiar self began to fall apart before my eyes, gradually at first and then all at once.

“I” now turned into a sheaf of little papers, no bigger than Post-its, and they were being scattered to the wind. But the “I” taking in this seeming catastrophe had no desire to chase after the slips and pile my old self back together. No desires of any kind, in fact. And then I looked and saw myself out there again, but this time spread over the landscape like paint, or butter, thinly coating a wide expanse of the world with a substance I recognized as me.

But who was this “I” that was able to take in the scene of its own dissolution? Good question. It wasn’t I, exactly. Here the limits of our language become a problem: In order to completely make sense of the divide that had opened up in my perspective, I would need a whole new first-person pronoun. For what was observing the scene was a vantage and mode of awareness entirely distinct from my accustomed self.

Where that self had always been a subject encapsulated in this body, this one seemed unbounded by any body, even though I now had access to its perspective. That perspective was supremely indifferent, unperturbed even in the face of what should have been an unmitigated personal disaster. The very category “personal,” however, had been obliterated. Everything I once was and called me, this self six decades in the making, had been liquefied and dispersed over the scene. What had always been a thinking, feeling, perceiving subject based in here was now an object out there. *I was paint!*

Lots of other things happened in Mary’s room, and in my head, during the course of my journey that day. I gazed into the bathroom mirror and saw the face of my dead grandfather. I trudged through a scorched desert landscape littered with bleached bones and skulls. One by one appeared the faces of the people in my life who had died, relatives and friends and colleagues whom, I was being told, I had failed properly to mourn. I beheld Mary transformed once again, this time into a ravishing young woman in the full radiance of youth; she was so beautiful I had to turn away.

At one point Mary put on one of Bach’s unaccompanied cello suites. It was the suite in D minor, a spare, infinitely sad piece that I’d heard many times before, often at funerals. But this time was different, because I heard it in my egoless, non-dual state of consciousness—though “heard” doesn’t do justice to what transpired between Bach’s notes and me. The preposition “between” melted away.

Losing myself in the music became a kind of rehearsal for losing myself, period. I let go of the rope of self and slipped into the warm waters of this ineffable beauty—Bach’s sublime notes, I mean, drawn from a cello’s black well of space by Yo-Yo Ma’s mournful bow as it surfed across its strings. I became identical to the music, a word that doesn’t begin to describe the power of what these unearthly vibrations were, or explain how they somehow lifted up and carried me beyond the reach of all suffering and regret.

The sovereign ego, with all its armaments and fears, its backward-looking resentments and



forward-looking worries, was simply no more, and there was no one left to mourn its passing. And yet something had succeeded it: this bare, disembodied awareness, which gazed upon the scene of the self's dissolution with benign indifference. I was present to reality but as something other than my usual self. And although there was no self left to feel, exactly, there was a feeling tone, and that was calm, unburdened, content. There was life after the death of the ego.

vii.

The Sunday morning session at CIIS began with great anticipation—the speaker was Dr. Ralph Metzner, who worked with Dr. Timothy Leary at Harvard, and is regarded as one of the wise elders in the psychedelic community.

Metzner is in his eighties now and, stepping up to the microphone in his newsboy's cap, he seemed frail. For much of his presentation, he read from one of his books—something about the soul and the six archetypal paths through this life. It wasn't until the Q&A that things got interesting.

A student who identified himself as a psychotherapist asked Metzner to talk about psychedelics, a subject he hadn't yet mentioned. With that gentle nudge, Metzner proceeded to veer wildly off message, exposing the tensions that Janis Phelps alluded to Friday night but that had been absent from the weekend's presentations thus far.

"These are drugs that psychotherapists unanimously feel could improve psychotherapy," Metzner began, "but their use is illegal. What does that tell you? Something about the society we live in!"

Metzner paused—and then jumped. "There is a vast underground network of psychedelic therapy, you know—vast. Larger than the approved uses of psychedelic therapy." He went on: "It's an underground culture, and underground cultures are good; in fact, they can be lifesaving."

Phelps, her porcelain complexion reddening, stood up, taking a step toward the lectern to solicit another question, but Metzner wouldn't be deterred. Declaring that we were in the midst of a spiritual emergency in this country, he told the students we have these "fantastically promising medicines that can cure all sorts of ills, and yet doctors can't get them."

Metzner's voice rose. "We don't have to accept that!" The eminent professor seemed to be inviting his flock to engage in a collective act of civil disobedience. This he likened to the underground in Germany, where he grew up, during the war: "There were German families who took in Jewish families and hid them in their closets." He voiced impatience with the pace of scientific research and federal approval, "at a time of civilizational collapse," when we have these medicines that we know work and could help our society right now. "It doesn't need to be proven over and over again. When there's a plague, you don't go through double-blind placebo-controlled studies! It's a plague!"

Finally it fell to Bill Richards to stand up and gently remind the students that while the pace of progress might be frustrating, "we have a path forward"—the path of sanctioned clinical trials leading to approval of psychedelic therapy. He pointed out that the researchers on this path had so far found federal regulators to be remarkably open and receptive. "So let's go forward as scientist-warriors and do what we can in the aboveground world. I think we can make a significant impact."

The students I spoke to afterward clearly shared Metzner's sense of urgency and frustration, but they rejected his apparent invitation to join the underground. In their view, Metzner was looking backward, to a dark age when the underground served as the saving ark of psychedelic therapy.

But that dark age was drawing to a close, they believed. A generation or two younger than Metzner, these people were looking resolutely forward—to a time, not too distant they thought, when the FDA would approve the therapeutic use of psilocybin and MDMA and make them available to doctors to prescribe to their patients. This was the future they had signed up for when they enrolled in the course.

One student in the class, a psychiatrist who had participated in psychedelic therapy in South

America for decades, told me after the session that she was now fully committed to the legal road. “I’ve had a secret life for 30 years,” she said. “I damn well want this opportunity to unify my life. Because of this class, I have a way to talk openly to people about psychedelics for the first time.”

She voiced deep respect for Metzner, but believed the time had come to make a choice. “I don’t want to lose the history or the knowledge we’ve gained from the underground work. But the professionals in this room have decided to put our time and credentials into furthering the legal use of these medicines.” Doing so, she said, “demands being beyond reproach so as not to endanger the work and the path that has been set out.”

Manish Agrawal, the Maryland oncologist, expressed the general sentiment in an email he sent me after Sunday’s session. He shared Metzner’s “frustration that this therapy isn’t available for my patients today, and many will suffer and die without access to this therapy. Ralph really pushed me to feel the injustice of that.”

He went on: “But everyone senses how close we are,” and doesn’t want to jeopardize that by following Metzner off the legal route. Agrawal left San Francisco determined to find a way to incorporate psychedelic therapy in his oncology practice.

viii.

The day after my journey, I was grateful for the opportunity to return to Mary’s room for a couple of hours of “integration.” Without it, people might be tempted to dismiss their psilocybin journeys as simply a “drug experience,” put it in that handy box and throw it away; this has no doubt been the fate of a great many psychedelic trips.

Yet though it is true that a chemical started me on this journey, it is also true that everything that I experienced I experienced: These are events that took place in my mind, psychological facts that were neither weightless nor evanescent. But I needed help making sense of them and putting them to use.

That I could survive the dissolution of my ego and its defenses was surely something to be grateful for, and we talked at length about this. What a remarkable gift: to learn that we can let go of so much—the desires, fears and defenses of a lifetime!—without suffering complete annihilation.

This might not come as a surprise to Buddhists or serious meditators, but it was news to me, who had never felt anything but identical to my ego. Could it be that there is another ground on which to plant our feet? For the first time, I began to understand what the volunteers in the cancer-anxiety trials were telling me—how it was that a single psychedelic journey granted them a perspective from which the very worst life can throw at us could be regarded objectively and accepted with equanimity. I had been given a glimpse of that liberating perspective.

“That alone seems worth the price of admission,” Mary offered, and I had to agree. I also realized that I never would have achieved that perspective had Mary not guided me, creating a space where I felt safe enough to let go of my accustomed self and its usual defenses.

Yet 24 hours later, my old ego was back in uniform and on patrol, so what long-term good was that beguiling glimpse of a loftier perspective? Mary suggested that, having had a taste of a different, less defended way to be, I might learn to relax the ego’s trigger-happy command of my reactions to people and events. “Now you have had an experience of another way to react—or not react. That can be cultivated.” She suggested meditation as one way to do that.

Many researchers believe that the experience of “ego dissolution” that I had in Mary’s room can disrupt destructive patterns of thought and behavior and open us to new perspective from which to view death or addiction or depression. This was understood back in the 1950s and 1960s, when psychiatrists working with psychedelics sometimes described it as “therapy by self-transcendence.”

If the ego can be said to have an address, it would probably be in something called the default mode network (DMN), a high-level hub in the brain linking the frontal cortex to older centers of

memory and emotion. The DMN appears to be involved in a range of operations related to our sense of self, like rumination, time travel (contemplating the past and future), theory of mind (the ability to impute mental states to others), and the so-called autobiographical self. It helps us integrate whatever's happening to us now with the story of who we are, thereby giving us an abiding sense of a self that is consistent over time.

Neuroscientists recently began imaging the brains of people on psilocybin or LSD, and they were surprised to find that, rather than increasing brain activity, as you might expect, the drugs radically quieted traffic in the DMN. In particular, when volunteers report the experience of ego dissolution, their brain imaging shows a precipitous drop in DMN activity.

Taking this network temporarily offline may allow the whole system to “reboot,” in the words of Robin Carhart-Harris, a pioneering neuroscientist who has done extensive work imaging tripping brains at Imperial College London. The “loosening of cognition” that results, he says, is especially helpful to people suffering from the varieties of mental stuckness, including depression, addiction, anxiety, and obsession.

All these conditions, as Alison Gopnik, a professor of psychology at Berkeley, points out, may share an etiology. “There are a range of difficulties and pathologies in adults, like depression, that are connected with the phenomenology of rumination, and an excessively narrow, ego-based focus.”

Gopnik's research explores the consciousness of children, which she believes bears a similarity to psychedelic consciousness. “You get stuck on the same thing, you can't escape, you become obsessive, perhaps addictive. It seems plausible to me that psychedelic experience could help get us out of those states, create an opportunity in which the old stories of who we are might be rewritten.”

ix.

Just how soon might psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy be available aboveground, to the many people who stand to benefit from it? Before the FDA approves a new medicine, the drug must survive testing for safety and efficacy in a three-stage sequence of trials, each of them involving a larger sample and more rigorous methods. When researchers recently brought to the FDA the results of Phase 2 clinical trials of cancer patients who were given psilocybin and MDMA, they were stunned by the positive response of the regulators. Regulators told them they could move forward to Phase 3 with MDMA, the last step before FDA approval.

The FDA is still considering when psilocybin trials can move into Phase 3. The agency wouldn't comment on drugs in the approval process, but a researcher who attended one of these meetings told me the regulators seemed untroubled by the illicit status of the drugs in question or by the unique challenges of controlling studies of psychedelics.

The researchers felt heartened by the FDA's response. The message the scientists took away from the meeting was that they should raise their sights and not limit themselves to treating cancer patients, but rather test the drugs on the much larger population of patients suffering from major depression.

Thus encouraged, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), a nonprofit that has been working for federal approval of psychedelics since 1986, will begin Phase 3 trials of MDMA-assisted psychotherapy this summer for the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder, involving more than 200 volunteers at 16 sites in the United States, Canada, and Israel.

Phase 3 trials, which typically involve hundreds of subjects at dozens of sites, can cost tens of millions of dollars—a cost ordinarily borne by the big pharmaceutical companies that stand to profit from approval. But Big Pharma has not demonstrated significant interest in psychedelics, and it's not hard to see why: Psychedelic therapy is a rather square peg to fit into the round hole of psychopharmacology as we now know it.

Patents on the molecules in question—LSD, psilocybin, and MDMA—have long since

expired; the drugs, if approved, don't need to be taken more than a few times; and as the CIIS program recognizes, psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy is a novel hybrid of pharmacology and talk therapy, making it uncharted territory for a pharmaceutical industry organized around the selling of pills.

But the obstacle of funding Phase 3 trials appears to have been recently surmounted. The Psychedelic Science Funders Collaborative (PSFC) a new Bay Area-based consortium of philanthropists including the hippie-soap entrepreneur David Bronner, the author and tech investor Timothy Ferriss, and other donors both in and out of the tech community, has helped raise more than \$63 million in charitable contributions, an amount that could be sufficient to complete the trials. The two main beneficiaries of these funds will be MAPS and Usona Institute, a nonprofit medical-research organization that is sponsoring forthcoming psilocybin trials. Rebekah Mercer, the Trump funder behind Cambridge Analytica and Breitbart, is also a donor to MAPS.

There is at least one corporation betting that psychedelic therapy will soon become a business. Founded in London by George Goldsmith, a health care industry consultant, and Ekaterina Malievskaia, a physician, Compass Pathways aims to become the world's first psychedelic pharmaceutical company. The couple, who are married, were inspired to expand access to psilocybin after Malievskaia's college-age son was successfully treated by an underground guide with the drug for a debilitating case of depression.

Compass aims to be much more than a drug company, however. The company is developing a complete treatment package—consisting of a training program for therapists; protocols for orchestrating the entire experience; and the medicine itself—that it hopes to sell to health care institutions and national health services, first in Europe and then in the United States.

Its initial therapeutic target is treatment-resistant depression (patients who have failed to respond to at least two previous treatments); after an advisory process with the European Medicines Agency (the EU's drug-regulating body), it has decided to conduct trials in eight to 10 sites across Europe. It is also in discussions with the FDA to organize trials here. According to Goldsmith, Compass has already raised \$13 million from investors in the United States and Europe, many of them from the tech community (Peter Thiel is an investor), but also institutional investors in the health care sector.

Phase 3 trials will take at least three years, but access to psychedelic therapy could come sooner than that. Under “expanded access” or “compassionate use” programs, patients who stand to benefit from therapies still deemed experimental can gain access to them before trials are complete. In the case of MDMA, this could happen as soon as 2020.

That tantalizing possibility is very much on the minds of the CIIS students. On the flight home, Manish Agrawal and his oncology partner Paul Thambi began planning how to talk to their colleagues about the idea of adding psychedelic therapy to their practice, and where in their offices they might create a treatment room. Did they plan to hire guides to conduct the sessions? Perhaps, they said, but the weekend had left them both convinced this was work they very much wanted to do themselves.

“We don't die well in this country,” Agrawal told me during a lunch break at the weekend course. “And we have pretty limited tools to help people deal with their fear. Prozac doesn't work. The issue isn't depression; it's facing your mortality.” The oncologists' commitment to training as psychedelic guides is notable; they would most likely be able to prescribe psilocybin once it's approved without years of experience, a prospect that concerns some of the underground guides I interviewed. “Just because you have the ability to prescribe,” one guide told me, “doesn't mean you have the wisdom to guide the experience.”

In the wake of the weekend's high hopes, I couldn't help wondering what the brave new world of legal psychedelic therapy might mean for guides like Mary and Michelle. I had heard some grumbling in the community about the limitations of the CIIS training, and the bitter twist that the psychedelic guides with the deepest experience could be excluded in favor of newly credentialed guides with no real-world experience whatsoever.

But Michelle said she is busier than ever. Mary, too, anticipates that federal approval of

psychedelic medicine would bring more people to her door, especially those without an obvious pathology—the curious, the spiritual seeking, and the legions of run-of-the-mill neurotics who already fill therapists’ offices. How many of them will want to try a guided psychedelic journey once they hear about it?

“I don’t think it’s going to hurt me at all,” Mary told me. “If anything, it will allow me to do even more than I do.” Was she worried about a crackdown if psychedelic therapy suddenly becomes fashionable? The work was too important to let that stop her. “I need to find a way to continue to protect myself, as I help people find their soul’s purpose in this lifetime, to help them awaken.”

Endnotes

1. See <https://www.entheoguide.net/> for further information.

* * * * *





Joe Ciccone


Death

It came in hot. And now it's freezing. Shivering. Seven twenty-seven.

The gears of the clock are crashing.
I tried for something.

Pressure on the outside. I'm getting this.
Seven twenty-eigh

* * *

Soldier

His notes were between the notes
most people could hear,

but tending to the bearded dead
stiffened his jaw,

dropped his brow line some,
and he stopped apologizing for it.

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Eleven

*"I must create a system,
or be enslaved by another man's"*
—William Blake, "Jerusalem."

cxviii.

Where did Ariel, aka Nazi Jailbait Bitch, go? She hung back when she saw Bekah up ahead. Kept a distance. Wasn't sure why. Eventually let them gain a long distance on her, & was alone, first time since emerging from her book. She finds me again, & nods me keep on with the rest of my companions.

Now what?

Am I Ariel or Nazi Jailbait Bitch, both, neither?

I'm still on the landing where they met Bekah, & then descended from. There's a shadow I now notice, & a door with a golden knob & a green knocker. Knocker has a crazy faced smiling imp.

OK, lift the knocker ring & *tap-tap-tap!* Wait. Wait longer.

A creak within. Couple more. Door opens a least bit.

A weird little voice making soft strange sounds.

I push the door in—realizing I'm on my own now for real. I think I was NJB, & now I'm Ariel. I don't know what this will mean as I go along.

NJB was good at deception, at misdirection, at leaving quickly & quietly while the man gargled out his life, or groaned it out his shred belly, or screamed it out, muffled by his severed cock stuffed halfway down his throat.

I don't think Ariel will want to use these skills too eagerly.

NJB comes from nowhere specific in the book. Her history is a few stray details of terrifying early violence, death to unnamed loved ones, escape.

Ariel is an English schoolgirl, orphaned young. On holiday travelling to France to visit her old sick

Auntie.

NJB's name is Ariel in the book, I realize now. *Oh*. She would make them beg her for sex using her name, & then again for their lives.

Ariel was her sister's name, one of those killed.

What was my name?

—& come into a cramped place fairly dark. The voice had stopped—

"I want my own name."

"You have two already."

"My own name."

I look at you & make a few adjustments. Now your hair strawberry blonde, green eyes. Don't change your clothes. Your sweet pretty young look is, for now, your armor, your ground, your root.

"Emily."

"Really."

"Ariel called you Emmy."

"Oh."

"The first one you killed tried to consume her. Torture her, fuck her, eat her. Like what they did to your parents & brother. You & she hid. Then she made a noise so you could get away."

"And."

"His gun belt was on the floor next to her bed. You shot him several times till he fell off her. Half his head gone. Several in his back."

"I was a bad shot then. And screaming."

"He'd already killed her."

"I stayed with her for a long time after pushing his body down the stairs."

"You burned the house down to the ground, & left in your school uniform."

"It's what I had on. I packed the other one."

I nod. OK. But then one more.

"You need a friend to travel with?"

"You? I thought we—"

I shake my head. "Take this over, Emily. We'll travel together again."

She sighs, nods.

Last thing I say, "Look along those shelves. There's a blank book. Find a pen. I think you write poetry."

The shelves are hard to sort through in this cramped space. I do find a blank book. Has a picture of a, um, rainbow wheel on it? Looks mysterious, like it's floating near the surface of the Wide Wide Sea. OK.

A pen. I find one that seems to have more than one color but I go with black for now.

Push deeper in, *push & push & push*—

And tumble out to grass, to very tall trees around me.

Stand. Look wordless around.

Oh. *Oh. The White Woods!* I remember. She, Ariel, wrote about them in her diaries! I peeked tho she never told me. But I'm sure!

I stand up, take a look & a sniff & a listen around. All still, sniffs friendly enough, & the ever low *hmmming* to be found here.

I'm barefoot but the ground is soft here. I walk on. I find I have a small knapsack on my shoulders, full of black/colored pens & blank book, for now.

Come to a structure, where no such thing could be? Old, ancient structure, like it's been made & remade over & over again, through centuries?

It looks like a kind of freestanding tunnel, I guess. No door on its entrance, but no light inside to see its open doorway either.

Another tight place, I moan a little. But, then again, *if this is Ariel's magickal White Woods, I should go, right?*

OK, I push on in what turn out to be very old & now colorless scarves, fragile to the touch, no danger—

Within is not too tight, almost like a very strange hallway without its building. *Does this make sense?*

It's like travel through centuries, this tunnel, yet not sequential. An area old & rocky, the next of virtual walls, the next a rainy night of endless vines.

I let loose more of what I was, feel the vines remove my garments a patch at a time, re-clothe me in strands of leaves. In allowing, so become else, become more.

Arrive to a plush & purple room, deep cushions high & low to fall into, I allow & fall, & fall, & fall—

Wake. Wake? There are two strange people near me now, but kindly faces. A girl with an arrow through her neck? A man with with three eyes, two hazel & one green?

And we are . . . moving? In a vehicle now?

Their kind touches, loving eyes, I don't know why.

Am I really here to this now?

cxxix.

[Maya & I sit here together at this office window desk in the Bungalow Cee, & have ourselves a palaver.

[“They want you to write now.”

“No they don't. Just on'y.”

“I can guide you.”

“How is that different from you writing it?”

"I describe, you interpret."

"Now you're lazy?"

"Visionary, like Bellla of La Entertainment & Technologies. 'Where tomorrow is today,' ya know."

"No."

"What then?"

[She stands, pink-streaked blonde hair & sexy in her scrawny fashion. Denim & tie-dye rags.

["Write it better. *Now*. Every line. Pay attention. Go."

"Flow state?"

"Whatever. *Go*."]

Maya, Kinley, Christina, & Dylan down in the World's Woods, where things are less certain.

This leads them to doubt too, themselves & each other. Now more keeping together in this murky dark place by habit & fear.

Come to rest again against one of the roots of the Great Tree. Exhausted, wordless.

[*Christina: did I really leave that farmer's house? Did I escape? Did it burn down?*]

[*Maya: did I meet Dylan on that bus ride? Are these the White Woods I never left?*]

[*Dylan: did I leave that bridge? Am I still with my old friends there under that bridge?*]

[*Kinley: Am I the Architect? Did I help make all this?*]

Each very alone, none very close, none holding hands.

Along his long travels now comes the pretty bloo-furred Edgar B. Bear. Fans of Algernon Beagle's fine newspaper *Bags End News* (O! Shucks!) will recall the fine times he had visiting Bags End back when.

Now he has come to the Great Tree at the heart of the world having heard there are expeditions afoot down here to learn the answer to the question, "Why is there something instead of nothing?"

Being a Creature, this sounded to him like a sort of fun people-folks game afoot.

Some have better luck at games than others, Edgar has learned in his travels. Some need a little nudge, is all, another kind word.

Walking more like dancing along when he comes across the four slumped people-folks, asleep or something against a root of the Great Tree.

He sniffs, twice, & he senses they are not doing well. Keeping at a bit of a distance, just a bit, he softly begins to *hmmm* to them.

Maya stirs first, sniffs too, & smiles to see Edgar. Weak smile but still.

"Hello, I'm Edgar B. Bear. How are you?"

"I'm Maya. Hi."

The others don't stir yet.

Edgar isn't sure what to say.

"We got lost," Maya says.

Edgar nods.

Maya thinks. "Do you know someone who could guide us?"

Edgar thinks, paw on chin. "Are you trying to find out why there is something instead of nothing?"

Maya nods, smiles a little. Not a lot.

Edgar thinks some more. Looks around. "Well, I have read of some great Travellers who seem to go everywhere."

Maya nods. Edgar is drawn to her lap, as Creatures are. She sniffs like people-folks & Creatures both, which is strange but nice.

She holds him & they softly *hmmm* together for awhile. She feels more like they will be OK, EBB will help & the Travellers will too. She will tell the others when they wake.

"Thank you" she hugs him very close before letting him on his way.

Now it is again her & her three sleeping friends. Dylan next to her, she quietly, very quietly, nudges a little nearer to him. Wonders if some other girl might dare hold his sleeping form's hand. She doesn't but enjoys what dare she can.

The World's Woods are quiet but not to all of her senses. The tingle on her arms keeps her alert for . . . something. Her sniff-sniff tells her no real danger is close. In the thick tangle of tall trees & brush, logs & stones, nothing in view contradicts this. Taste? What's on her tongue faintly is salty yet sweet, whatever it is.

A long while at this rest. Then Dylan, half-waking, reaches for her hand, finds it, ripples her heart with his small smile.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Both want to say the perfect words right now.

"Are you OK?"

"I think so. You?"

"Yes."

They should just hold each other close, kiss, let the doors fling wide between them.

He tries. "I'm glad we found each other. And Kinley & Christina too."

Maya nods, losing words.

"I don't know how to say anything, Maya. For the longest time I only wanted to find you, be near you."

"Me too."

"He will be back."

"Oh yes. I'm sure."

"OK."

Their hands remain clasped. Whatever this is.



Christina nuzzles further now into Kinley's grasp. He does not fully wake but lets her find her most comfortable space.

The morning arrives somewhat & they each drift away again.

xxxx.

"Hail stones the size of tornadoes! Door glass breaks! Loosed shutters flying by!" the old man's muffled voice could be heard long before he was in sight of them.

He was riding in the back of a singular vehicle known in the White Woods & thereabouts as the Bike-Wagon, & peddled by Memphis the bear, a handsome little brown Creatures wearing a warm green sweat-jacket labeled "Maine."

The old man is some kind of a monk, emaciatedly thin but for his long brown & grey braided beard. Piercing turquoise eyes. Heavily lipsticked mouth, a dark rose color. His black robe held upon him with gruelly old ropes.

Memphis peddles his wagon up alongside the four waking figures leaning against one of the roots of the Great Tree. He raises his paw as he rolls to a stop.

The old man stands up in the cab & begins telling his muffled story. "One day long ago, I woke up deep in the night, & I walked outside. I walked away, & I walked through the streets till I came to the edge of the Village, & I walked beyond it till I came to the brown hills, & I walked up them into these White Woods, & I had no shoes on my feet, like you see me here now" (& here he lifted up his gnarly feet to show), "& I had on only this robe" (shows front & back), "& I left everything behind to walk into these White Woods, & that night I fell down to my knees & looked up, & I said, 'let me be the world's servant like once I was! Let me serve the world again! Let me help!'"

He slumps back in his seat again, but then half rises up & says, "And my admirable friend here rolled up to my sorry heap by morning, & offered me a ride."

Memphis nods to them friendly.

Now speaks sitting, like his body is conserving all energy for his spoken thoughts. Not very loud, but no longer muffled.

"I ask myself: *what is beyond Emandia & this world & whatever the Architect's home world? What at the beginning, what at the end? How can any man who lives but a miniscule fragment of it know much of it all really?*" Wheezes. Breathes. Continues.

"I wonder & I wonder. I can't explain myself, anything around me, these White Woods. You, Kinley, loving your books & mysteries, still a tiny tot. You, Christina, your candy flesh molded strange 'round your wild brilliant mind. You, Dylan, the great Tender you might one day train with Creatures to be. You, Maya, cupped from deeply magick soup."

Half-snoring, half talking on now.

"The Elliptical City is where I'm bound now, my dear friend will bring me. Where I might find

something braided strong to uphold me. Something warm to water & sup me. Music to clean out these old veins & bones. Maybe you'll come too. If you remember my words as more than a dream. Your friends approach now. Doze, sweet ones. Await them."

He nods an old slight smile to Memphis the Bear who raises his paw by signal to all he is peddling on again. Soon they are gone, & the four people-folks drift in vague dreams again.

[Because I can, because it's this kind of book, I draw a bracket & contain within it these words. Some days feel more dangerous than others, needlessly dangerous, like the human thing is chaos deepest in its mortal heart—like the many stories told to calm, of great eternal worlds to come, of kindly supra-beings welcoming all passed from this world to a more final, a safer, sweeter home, aren't enough.

[I realize nobody knows for sure better than I do. Maybe this is a sad thing to realize. There are tricks & tools & skills & instincts to navigate this world, ways to feel healthier, safer, better loved. But none work for all, & no combination is the magick one for perpetual happiness. Life seems like a travel along a half-seen path with a changing cast of companions, more & less visible affects within & without &, sometimes at its feeling best, no reason to deduce why!

[I remember one summer I worked in a city, in an office, & I wrote & wrote & read & read & read & listened to music obsessively, & missed a girl I'd loved who was now far, & less interested. I would sit on the second floor, a mezzanine really, of a McDonald's, writing stories precursor to this one, drinking my diet Coke & eating some food, listening on headphones to my Walkman. It was a city I'd been born in, & spent years during high school & college & after college coming to visit, for its bookstores & library & parks & record shops. I'd been there with her many times, & it smelled of her own scent in my mind's sniff.

[This girl was everything to me, as others had been before her awhile, & others would be long after her. I loved deeply if not so always very sensitive to needs not my own. Love was like a powerful material I used to patch the many holes & wounds deep in me. It often worked like ice on fevered skin.

[I sat there with my notebooks & soda & Walkman, come from a day of office work, & I wrote & wrote, sometimes directly of, sometimes far from, my longing for her. It gave me sometimes a feeling of aliveness in the moment, rather than simply absence & waiting.

[What had this girl wanted? A career in teaching. Maybe a man with a good cock. Maybe someone to spank her fine ass, maybe more. Our borders were intense, where open to each other. But how much wasn't? How much was unseen path, invisible affects?

[Eventually she was gone, a slowly diminishing wound, but what I often recall of that summer is that McDonald's mezzanine, how often I sat there with notebooks & soda. Like the deepest lingering part of a story is somewhere in the middle, where narrative is under way but much yet to reveal.

[The Beatles' *White Album* on my dear friend Polly iPod, quarter past midnight. "Happiness . . . is a warm gun . . . yah!" Music I know so well yet only recently learned was brought back from their 1968 Indian pilgrimage to be assembled in acoustic form in a few days' jam session, before being brought to the studio. Still trying to be Beatles as so much around & among them pushed them apart. Yet trying, the beautiful sounds of *four brothers still trying*.]

"Choot! Choot!" comes the nearing cry of a strange & lovely vehicle. Up rolls, on its own self-

perpetuating tracks, a red-&-yellow Choot-Choot Train. Sitting in its engine cab is a tall handsome gent & a bloo-&-pink piglet Creature with a pleased smirk. At the helm of the train, upon peering close inspection, a tiny imp, cackling merrily as she uses strange levers to steer, & a green-&-gold . . . bookmark . . . arrow?

In the train cars behind, three people-folks sit with many many Creatures, & a . . . Tumbleweed.

Best of all is when suddenly emerges from the train's engine's cab a lovely bloo Bear Creature known to Kinley & his dreaming friends.

"Here we are!" says Edgar B. Bear happily.

cxix.

Wow, 13 years so far of writing this book, 3500 pages so far. Come to Harvard Square on a Saturday afternoon, beloved home, sleeping with a cold. Me some hours to this work, & see what of it this time.

I've come to write here since 1992, so 27 years, come this September.

Minus the years I lived out West, 6 years, & then some recent ones when this courtyard was changed from fenced & four-treed coziness to this larger & fenceless sprawl.

Labyrinthine began in Seattle, Washington, & continued through Portland, Oregon, four years of it in all, & nine years now in Boston.

Like a culmination of all the stories & novellas proceeding it, longer & vaster than all of them, the perpetual one.

Sitting here practically half my life now. The permanent chess tables nearby, not stone like the old ones, but metal & wood. The glass building behind me, its first floor no longer the Au Bon Pain Cafe but now a deep, maze multistoried geography of tables & chairs & greenery. I like it. Enough.

Out here is still different but maybe closer to then. The sidewalk's tourists & locals & students & freaks still streaming along. The old brick buildings still fronting Harvard Yard.

There's a white-haired guitarist nearby who's been playing here for countless years. The bookstores near here, one I worked at long years ago. Restaurants & stores come & go.

That digital bank clock over there, about five floors up, & I remember when it was a bulbed clock.

"It's time, Raymond."

"Hi, Maya."

"Hi."

"It's time."

"Now?"

"Yes. Go."

"We'll tell this together, Maya,"

"OK."

When the Great Travelers finally arrived to where Kinley & Christina & Dylan & Maya sat dreaming in a row along one of the roots of the Great Tree, arrived led by Edgar B. Bear & the green-golden compass, accompanied by many Creatures, they decided to sit down & wait for these people-folks to

wake up. They formed a semi-circle around the dreamers.

Who would not, in this peacefully glowing White Woods, cool & quiet save for a faint *humming* of breeze & something else, I say who would not tempt eventually into dreaming too?

Marie, Joe, Derek, & Daniel, with the many Creatures come along, all in this semi-circle, fell clustered asleep, & thence Dreamland, & there before them a very tall & many colored Carnival tent.

On it countless famous images to behold. The ancient strange & massive Tangled Gate. White Bunny like the one among this dreaming cluster. Dancing Bears, purple furry Creature, tiny cackling little pandy bear. The Princess in her many iterates through centuries. A map of the 6 Islands, from ancient times, still clustered together.

At the entrance to the tent is a bright-eyed brown-furred Bunny who smiles them with a waving paw to come in.

Inside are many pillows & blankets, luring sniff & soft *hmmm*, soft colourous light, & then Marie starts, finger upon chin, & points to the corner where sit Kinley, Christina, Maya, & Dylan! They in turn spy the arrived Travellers.

Tis Daniel & Kinley who are nudged to approach & greet each other. They do, meet halfway.

“Well, hello.”

“Indeed!”

“Nice enough way to meet.”

“A good start.”

“I’m Kinley.”

“I’m Daniel. Your little blue friend Edgar brought us to guide you.”

“Thank you. Felt like we had stalled.”

“It happens. Down here the worst danger is lack of motivation.”

Kinley laughs.

Daniel holds out for show the strange Compass he explains has led them there. It looks like a bookmark to Kinley’s study, one side a green arrow edged in gold, the other black with white inked handwriting upon it. “Why is there something instead of nothing?”

Kinley laughs again & touches this question. “This is why we’re here!”

Daniel smiles. “This Compass will help us.”

Now the others are ready to meet. Christina smirks a hello at Daniel, Dylan a friendly nod, & Maya a shy twinkle, as each passes by to greet the other Travellers & Edgar B. Bear & the other Creatures.

Everyone arranges in a loose circle of blankets & pillows, the friendly colourous *humming* scent like sharing a meal here in Dreamland—

till morning brings them back to their waking group & they meet again.

“Choot! Choot!” is the nearby cry suddenly heard.

Daniel holds out the Compass. “This will help out your question quest.”

“Come with us.”

“Yes!” says Christina.

Maya & Dylan nod too. Daniel looks at his own smiling group, knowing the Creatures will come & go as they will. Nods.

So all hurry too, & board the Choot-Choot train, hauling enough open-air passenger cars for all.

Now in the engine cab will sit the engineer Imp, Daniel & Kinley, & Edgar B. Bear. The Compass mounted to guide.

The ride through what’s known as the World’s Woods, where things are less certain, is peaceable for a long stretch, a timeless length, until the Compass, mounted on the dashboard near the steering lever with its three speeds (Stop, Choot! & Choot!-Choot!), begins to shiver & shake & raise up to a steep angle.

“A hill coming, D?”

“I think so, K!”

Turns back & calls. “Hill ahead! Everyone buckled in?”

“Safety first!” everyone calls back.

The Choot-Choot train rolls up its own tracks the steep hill beyond the White Woods, up & up, until arriving to the flat top, & now rolls along this ridge so the passengers can behold what’s down below & beyond to see.

Tis a strange, shiny, & uniquely marvelous Elliptical City. Seems to rise up & up & up like strange evolving layers, like a city bound up for outer space.

Sitting next to Daniel, holding the Imp in place for her steerings & Choot! Chootlings, Kinley’s eyes shine like the City’s highest turrets & towers. “How do I know this place? Did I daydream it? Have I been here long ago?” Daniel nods to the crazy-eyed Imp in his grasp & she pushes their speed to Choot! Choot! & they speed downhill now toward the outskirts of Elliptical City.

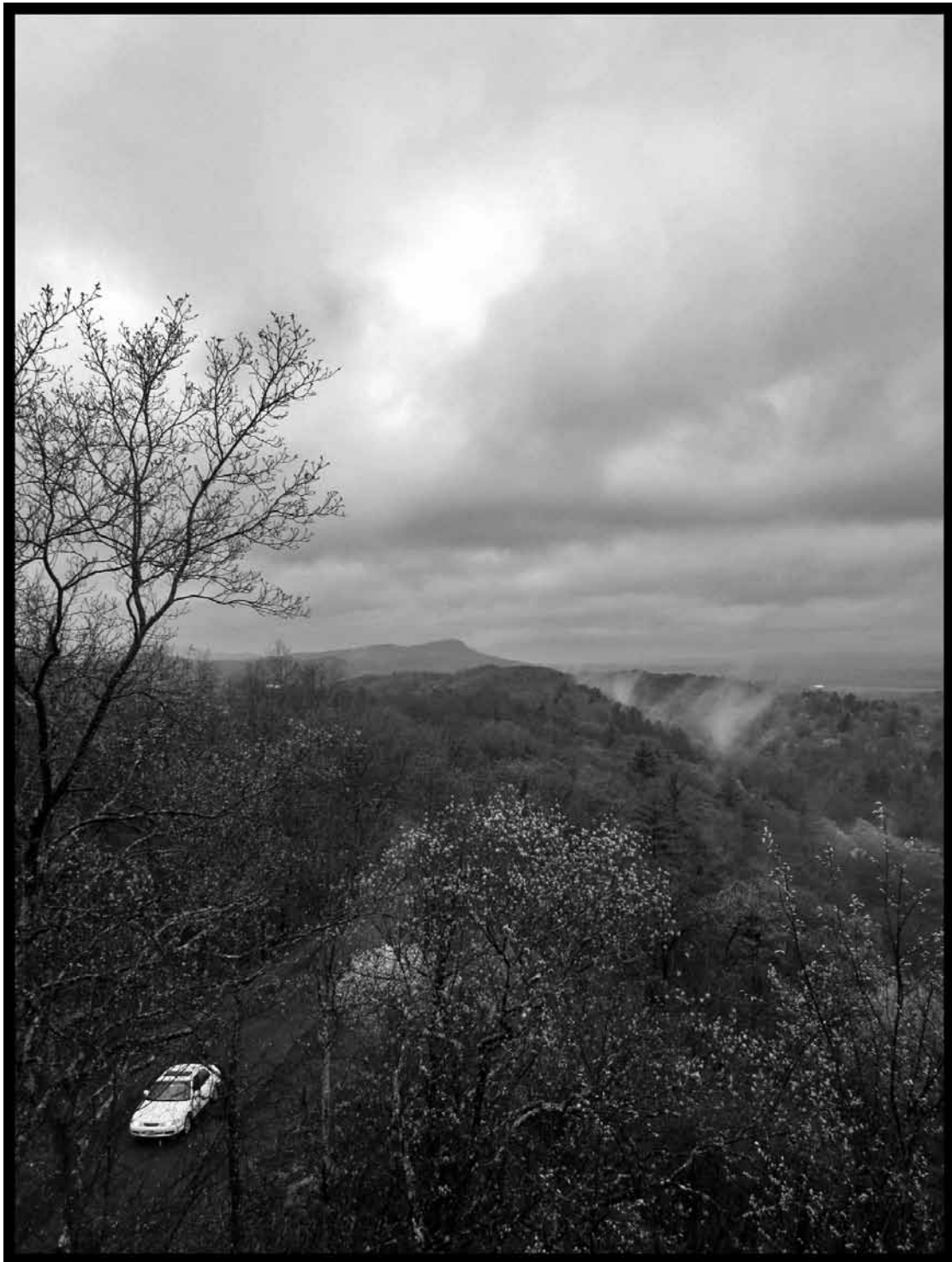
The outskirts are not nearly as shiny as what’s to come. They stall as they are passing an old & ragged sign:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
/// Elliptical City: ///
/// for those lost ///
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Stalled. Train will not move forward or back. Neither the Imp, who cackles unhappily, nor Daniel or Kinley are sure what to do. The latter two climb out to look around for help.

As though strangely on cue comes down the street near them a roofless bus. Pulls right up & door opens.

Tis an ancient gent in the driver’s gent. Swathed in a long robe of myriad patterns, odd square hat on his head, long beard. Looks perhaps Chinese, & maybe a thousand years old. Strong, papery voice.



“Got engine trouble, do ya? Grab a hitch!” Daniel sees what he means, & he & Kinley hook up the Choot-Choot Train by hook & cable to the roofless bus. Then Kinley & the Imp get back into the train’s engine cab to steer, & Daniel climbs on board the bus & tells the bus driver they’re ready. “TooT! TooT!” his horn sounds, & they now move deeper into Elliptical City.

Kinley remembers, only the Imp to tell right now.

“It was a faux pizza joint I knew a long time ago, only a couple of times really, but I remember someone told me I needed to get there soon, & give the owner the secret password to the back room. Fondo Wondo!”

The Imp cackles merrily at this.

“There was a layout of a city in back, in miniature. Filled the whole room. I would study it for hours, down to its smallest bush & alley. And Woods, like these, & a Traveling Carnival, & its performers, its stars, two sisters who sang, their father played guitar. So sweet! She was so sweet . . .” The Imp cackles as he says no more.

Daniel is sitting up front of the bus, first passenger seat, & he notices a folded up newspaper tucked into the seat. *Elliptical City Sunday Globe*. Opens it up from curiosity, notices a small article about a Philosophical Dinner & a Space Priestess come to visit. Wonders if this would help.

The roofless bus motors deeper into Elliptical City until it pulls up in front of a building with a friendly smirking bloo-&-pink sign:

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
/// O.C.’s Fix-It ///
/// Shoppe! ///
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

The driver looks at Daniel & nods & says, “Your stop. They’ll do you right. Take the paper.”

So Daniel thanks him & hurries off to unhook the Choot-Choot Train & wave the bus away. He & Kinley stand together waiting once this is done.

Not long. Out from the building comes skippety-scampering a bloo-&-pink piglet Creature wearing a friendly smirk & a workman’s shirt with an “O.C” patch on it.

“Hello, folks! What’s your trouble?”

Daniel & Kinley show O.C. the train & its track & explain how it’s not moving like it should.

O.C. raises a paw to them to wait & she skippety-scampers high & low on the train, waving friendly to its many passengers. The Imp cackles especially merrily. O.C. climbs right under the train & is there a long while—then she comes out with the tiniest pebble in her paw.

“That’s your trouble. Now be on your way, folks!”

About to return to her shoppe, O.C. notices Daniels's newspaper. Smirks extra pleased. "See you at the Philosophical Dinner?"

Daniel unfolds the newspaper & taps the article. "What is a Philosophical Dinner?"

"People come to ask why."

Kinley speaks up. "Can anyone ask?"
"Sure."

"Would you like to ride up there with us? We're new to the, um, Elliptical City."
O.C. smirks extra friendly. "Sure! Let me tidy my shoppe & close."

So they wait a short while for O.C. who soon comes out sans work shirt but now in a stylish hat with a long curling feather.

Kinley, Daniel, & O.C. get into the engine's cab & the Imp gives their passengers a happy "Choot! Choot!" to signal their trip resumed. The train moves forward again, all fixed.

Elliptical City gets more & more complex to the newcomers to it. The buildings begin to bend & tangle, sometimes twist among each other. The Imp, as rarely, slows to "Choot!" speed in her uncertainty.

O.C. sees the road ahead perfectly, straight & smooth. "Newcomers," she thinks, & offers to steer.

She can see the Compass on the dashboard directing straight ahead. Slowly she drives them along.

To reassure their jitters, she says, "Let's use your fine Compass & some local know-how! Now each of you touch paw to paw, all of you in the back too! Close your eyes & *hmmm* our way along!"

So they all do. It calms them & she easily steers them along until they pull up & stop.

"Right over there is the start of the Philosophical Dinner!" she announces.

xxxxii.

Everyone opens their eyes & is glad to be on a usual city street. O.C. is pointing to the beginning of a stony walkway. Kinley & Daniel lead the way with O.C.

The crowd behind them is quiet but agreeable.

Still, Christina is never one to hold back a word. Looks at Marie in her long flowery dress & bare feet & finally asks what she's been wondering. "What did you do before . . . all this?"

Marie smiles. "I'm a Schoolteacher. We've been traveling awhile."

Christina nods. "A shorter skirt & you could have been my main competition for Kinley." No rancor in her voice.

Marie shakes her head, smiling polite.

The stony walkway winds up in twists & turns for a long while. Eventually the people-folks all stop &

collect the many Creatures in their arms. White Bunny & Hedgedyhog, many Giraffes & Bears, shiny-eyed Creatures of various kinds. The Imp stayed back to nap in her engine cab.

Finally, they come to the top of the stony walkway, & behold there a green door with a golden doorknob.

Kinley & Daniel exchange a look & nod & push on through to discover . . . an escalator.

Kinley looks searchingly at O.C. in his grasp. "This is the way to the Philosophical Dinner?"

O.C. in paw smirks anew. "Folks, this *is* the Philosophical Dinner!" Points to the escalator. "Next course!"

So they get on to ride up. Notice alongside the escalator a bookcase filled with strange objects.

[It was like my memories of the G. Fox & Co. department store, back in Hartford, Connecticut, had crossed into this narrative.]

One escalator ride showed many appliances, stoves, refrigerators, sinks. Hop off, turn, hop on, next showed couches & recliners & comfy armchairs. Hop off, turn, hop on, next showed toys. Next lawnmowers & rakes. Next books, vinyl LPs & cassette tapes.

Finally they arrived to the top of the series of escalators, to a sunny green field.

There, at a fair distance, was a strange figure, turned away from them. Wild feathered headdress up top, thick black boots down low. Tool belt in the middle.

O.C. skippety-scrampered right over & the figure made many moaning sounds to the newcomers' ears. Long moaning sounds, keening high & low. O.C. chattered in her usual friendly smirky way & led the figure over, whose face could now be seen, wildly decorated in black & white, many eyes & markings & hard to tell any of it, & the moanings told little more.

O.C. saw their deeply uncertain faces & guessed the problem. "Newcomers," she thought. Have to figger this.

She said to all of them, "This is the Space Priestess, come for our Philosophical Dinner. I think, to meet properly, we should all close our eyes to begin this course."

She leads our uncertain people-folks & quiet Creatures to form a circle around the strange Space Priestess. Sit & touch paw to hand to paw. Close eyes.

Then *hmmm*, but not quite like any other; more like a *hmmm-cha! cha! cha! hmmm-cha! cha! cha!* Funny as it sounds, & a relaxing spreads through the circle. And then the Space Priestess joins in.

Her moanings are still scary at first, but they keep along & all seems to blend to something not quite *hmmm-cha! cha! cha!* nor either the scary moans. All eyes still closed, & yet colors to see, 6 or 7 of them, & a sweet thrilling scent.

No longer scared, the blended *hmmmoans* went on & on till O.C. led all from this closed eyes vision to open ones, & everyone saw that the Space Priestess was gone.

“Come along, my new friends!” called O.C. heartily, & she pointed her bloo-&-pink paw toward the far end of the green field.

Well, the people-folks & Creatures all stood up & headed along. No hurry now, nor need for Creatures to be carried.

“Next course is over there!” encouraged O.C.

But “over there” was a farther way than it seemed, as the sun above travelled across the sky with them, & was fairly low by when they reached the edge of the One / White / World’s Woods, & everyone took ease upon the grass.

And nobody objected when Kinley suggested they camp right there for the night. All the people-folks unpacked pillows & blankets & food from their pockets & knapsacks. Great full moon above, & about a bajillion stars to admire.

And O.C. smirking friendly & saying, “Look up there, my fellow diners. It’s the next course of our Dinner!”

What to make of the strange & wonderful stars in this so weirdly placed sky, deep in the heart of the world?

I think it might have been that little purple furred Creature Pirth who started in first.

He was dancing lightly, back & forth, ribbons in his paws flying a bit about him, when he saw that his upraised paws seemed to move some of the stars up there, back & forth, all around, & they would settle back when he paused.

Wanting to show, he danced up to sitting Maya, & into her lap, & tug a little to stand her up, & a little more to hop into her hand & raised high, & her giggle at his play succeeded by a happy cry of delight when she saw how he danced with the stars, this way & that, sometimes seeming to disappear within them, like they a cloak wrapped round his dancings. She showed to everyone’s delight.

What else might all this be?

Christina sudden stood & smirked & reached up both hands to gently loose scoops of stars into her grasp & then set to shaping them into sculptures, abstract & beautiful, twining in & amongst each other, & moving among all her friends for a closer look before returning back to the sky—

Marie’s finger on chin thinking led her to reach up for scoops & scoops of stars & she molded them into a large curved disk like the one she & Joe had used to slide down the very occasionally snowy hill by their Fishin’ Hole compound—she invited all the Creatures & people-folks to join her sitting on the disk, Joe smiling biggest for memory, & they used upward paddling hands to rise, & downward paddling hands to land again—

Eventually everyone helped to fashion a starsy blanket with pillows for all to cluster in, to dream on of this wonderful place & course in their Philosophical Dinner.

There was eventually in among stars & all these friends a small twinkling light, tiniest of things, lingering long enough to be nearly seen, & no more, & yet something in its brief twittering, not purpose but reminder: had their question been answered? Was it being answered in some other kind of way by the courses in this Philosophical Dinner? Would others join them in their searching?

What would the main course of the Philosophical Dinner be like? What would they learn? The tiny

twinkling light up there, among those strangely stars, led them wondering unto the rising Imp in the Full Moon, her cackling, merry ways, up further to the generative places of strangely stars, Imaginal Space where all passed through & supped awhile, up further, beyond up, to the forever of now, colors & music & scents & tastes & clusters & the bajillion other senses of sentience pouring in & out, ever mixturing new, through the magick that brings one to the furthest edges of things, & a little beyond for tricks, & yet arrives all back to here, back to now, back to the trickles in of dawn, where all reshapes to daylight & these friends all clustered under their own fine blankets—& the sense that this dreaming was another course, & the penultimate to the Philosophical Dinner's main one to come.

cxxxiii.

Morning now come, time to pack, & get along.

O.C. in her quiet smirking still Creaturely way gathers them all together before they actually go—

“The main course isn't like the rest, though I can't say what it will be each time. It's like it's full of the others but more too.” Being a Creature, albeit more of an easily talky one, she nonetheless still struggles to say.

But everyone nods this enough for now, & they set off at an easy ragged pace, wondering how soon they will come to their goal.

But the day passes in simple ongoing passage, not arrival. These Woods are beautiful, more clear & yet powerfully still vague; were they waking or still dreaming or neither & both?

Kinley holds the Compass before him as Daniel keeps apace.

“What are the rules here?”

“Its own. Whatever they are.”

Kinley nods.

Night came again, even at the heart of the world. Tired, a kind wanting real sleep, came, & out again the blankets & pillows to cluster up & sleep, & a relief in it. Clustered close & those stars joyously beautiful but kept their playful distance.

In the morning it was more of the same, the people-folks among them not even thinking about eating. Just pack & carry forth for hours again—

Sometimes a vague feeling that these Woods were carrying them, that their steps were no way to measure the distance covered—

& yet, mortal even down here, the evening light paused them again at a clearing & blankets & pillows & clustering & again the well-behaved stars—

But oh so close to where they were bound, just half a day's walk or less—

Which is what they discovered the next morning as it was hardly noon when they came to a clearing & here was a small hut, glowing.



The Creatures sniffed but did not approach too close. The people-folks stepped close to examine it.

It was not abandoned but did not feel occupied either. There was a plaque on the door depicting a crazy smiling Imp, next to a firmly shuttered window.

Nothing about this Hut reached out to any of them. Still uncertain, they moved on, & the day seemed to resume like the rest.

But it was hardly much a stretch of time before there was a sound some distance back from where they'd come.

The Compass sudden came to life urgently & practically drug Kinley to return to that noise. He gave a shout & waved his arm for all to follow—

They hurried & hurried, & then they were suddenly halted before the sight of a simple grey Squirrel.

An animal or a Creature or something else? It made a strange low noise, a chittering? a cackling? And then was off again, leading the group along, leading them by a strangely gnarly path back . . . to the Hut they had examined & left.

But at a different angle from how they'd first had come upon it, more hidden as through to study it from a distance rather than approach it so closely.

Then the Squirrel was gone, brung them where intended.

Nobody said anything, none of the people-folks or even the Creatures. They were here to watch & watching now made sense, so watch they did.

[What had changed? What had they missed?

[It was the arrival to this clearing of a small brown & white Beagle named Algernon. He came upon the Hut like surprised, studied it, approached, studied it more, & then pushed the door in & it closed behind him. Was in there now. The Hut's glow began to reveal this & our friends saw within the Hut now.]

[[Algernon Beagle is with a bald leathered up muscular man & they are talking. We all nudge forward a bit to listen. He is talking to AB in intense study.

[[“You need to close your eyes to see better into those frozen rainbow falls, Algernon Beagle.”

[[We could see AB startle at Benny's voice; had he just manifested?

[[“I can guide you,” says Benny Big Dreams, now we all know his name because we are more clustered together, touching paw to hand, knowledge seeming to freely flow among us by this touch.

[[“Is it Dreamland in there?” asks AB suspiciously.

[[“Better!” Benny replies excited.

[[AB nods & closes his eyes & again studies deeply the frozen rainbow falls before him but . . . again . . . nothing.

[[BBD leans in closer behind AB & says softly, “*Hmmm*,” & leads AB into one.

[[“Now open your mind’s eyes. We’re going back to the time when there was no sleeping or waking. A *unitive time* when each was part of all, always is. *This is why there is something instead of nothing*. Now look around but keep touch to me. Let’s walk forward.

[[We were now spread hand to paw in a circle that surrounded the glowing translucent hut. Our eyes closed too, AB & BBD’s *hmmm* spreading amongst us by touch, smell, taste—

[[We opened our mind’s eyes when Benny told Algernon to do so, & here were what felt like very ancient White *Woodsssss*

[[We could feel everything around us, as clear as the touch amongst us—everything touched near & far, everything glowed together, everything sniffed friendly, mushrooms? rutabegas?

[[*Everything hmmmms*

I hmmm, I am

We hmmm, we are

[[“*We are the Hmmm*,” are Benny Big Dream’s words to AB & the rest of us listening, & these words lingered & danced among themselves & repeated over & over forever until—

[[[Someone worried. Someone loved Algernon Beagle & worried his stretch in space through time to unitive time, more than one someone really & now more—

[[[And AB stumbled, looked around confused, near panic, the colors glimmer weirdly, there is a shudder through it all, what then?

[[[AB very shakily chews a tiny something from his paw & we can feel him calm, & we *hmmm* again better now, & gentle help him to tug back to the hut, where he has never left, to now, which it always is here, *space become time*

[[We feel him arrived fully. Shakily, he leaves the hut but looks around at all of us bewildered.

[[He looks at all of us, one quiet moment after the next. We keep *hmmming* by touch & waiting.

[[Then he raises his paw to still us, & talks in his funny accent. “You were all *hmmming* to help guide me.” There were many nods & smiles. “You followed me here to there & back again.” More nods.

[[He points to the Hut. “That’s the Original Root,” he says slowly. “Where we all come from. Why there is something instead of nothing?” last words like a question-toy he touched, new & uncertain to it.

[[But he talks on, like more certain now, has to say. “But it was only just the first why. All of us are why too!” Pauses. Then: “Sort of like that tricky pandy bear says. None, one, many. In that order though. And for whys.”

[[[A soft cackle somewhere]]]

[AB starts walking purposefully & we sort of ragged random form up a caravan to follow him.

[Climb back up among the many roots to the great mountainous trunk of the Great Tree. Its green & golden fruits tinkling gently on its branches.

[We kept walking for miles & years to arrive what some of us let the rest of us know was a great magickal Liberry. Many strange vehicles waited us. Boat Wagon. Beatrix BunnyCycle, Choot!-Choot! Train, Bike Wagon, a waking from nap Calgary the Sea Dragon, others.

[Algernon suddenly exclaimed, "We're awake!" & soon we were in another sitting paw to hand circle, with AB & Benny in the middle talking.]

Benny: "I had to prove to you that Dreamland isn't all sticky trouble, like you've known." Humble words.

Algernon stared him wordless.

Benny: "Down there, the Great Tree & its roots & the Hut, there's no then & now. Unitive time is somehow connected from those Ancient Woods like a road to the Great Tree."

AB still stared, waiting.

Benny: "So I, um, borrowed a little to get your Caravan down there so you can see it all. And you could write & tell everyone about it, Algernon." Benny sunk to one knee before AB, his trickeries on lowest flame.

Silence. Then: "OK, Benny, I am no would-be king or real princess or any other kind of big guy like many here, but I can say we all know now how Dreamland is not just *over there* for Imagianna. There is a way from all of our homelands." Benny nodded. More: "And because you're trouble, you had to show us your own way." Nod. "And this is all hardly much to know?" Nod, nearly a cackle.

Silence. Then: "Your friend Abe the Ancient Sea Turtle said to give you a present. So here is what I have. I will make you Apprentice Reporter to mah newspaper. I will let you know when." Benny nearly cheered.

Then Algernon Beagle sort of tipped upon himself & passed out.

Princess Crissy & Sheila Bunny hurried him up to her royal bed to rest. The rest of us waited & fretted but no reason to worry. His was just an exhausted brainbone.

It was not in time but in space that all of us gathered in the Saturday Juice Room of the Creature Common, & for a marvelous Grand Production, "A Caravan of Everybody!" put on by the Royal Thumbs Productions, famed entertainers. Leaping Bears, White Bunny, tiny Petits Thumbs, jumping Monkey fellow—Sheila's Kool Jazz Band's Trane & Bird & Dizzy tunes—a bajillion Thoughts Fleas & their Mushroom cuzes here in the White Woods, jumping up & down, now all of us, crying, "*No Roots! No Roots! No Roots!*" till those Petits Thumbs seemed impossibly yes resting upon Benny Big Dreams' hard muscled chest, black t-shirt with its words—

*Neither Death Nor Dream
are truly a **Remote Land***

him sleeping beatific, him smiling all calm, all release, a Bunny Pillow under his head, a purple-cloaked yellow one near too, *all is dream, all is dream, all is dream, all is dream, all is dream, all is dream*

*Nothing last but nothing is lost
Just open your mind's eyes*

*Who is this purple furry Creature
dancing on my chest?
What is this damned spaceship
again?*



To be continued in Cenacle | 109 | October 2019

* * * * *



*WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES
FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC
REVOLUTION*

Music. Poetry. Rant. Mindfood.

turn on . . .

tune in . . .



On the Web: <http://www.spiritplantsradio.com>

Saturdays 11am - 2pm Eastern US time

Repeats: Sundays 8 pm-11 pm Eastern US time

Scriptor Press

Independent Publishing Since 1995



Scriptor Press is an independent press founded in 1995 in Cambridge, MA. Scriptor Press publishes the quarterly literary magazine *The Cenacle*; the *RaiBooks* literary chapbooks series; & an annual *Sampler* of selected works. It also hosts the quarterly meetings of the Jellicle Literary Guild.

Visit us online at ScriptorPress.com
for more information.

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Algernon Beagle lives in Bags End. He is the Editor guy for *Bags End News*. Delightful books made from the stories in his delightful newspaper appear regularly in *The Cenacle*.

Charlie Beyer lives in New Castle, Colorado. His recent news is: “today we pack an entire adventure and move to the woods. Glory is upon us.” Safe travels again, brother! More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Ace Boggess lives in Charleston, West Virginia. His poems appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His poems in this issue previously appeared in *The Aurora Review*, *Willard & Maple*, & *Zillah*. His most recent book of poetry is *I Have Lost the Art of Dreaming It So*, published by Unsolicited Press in 2018. Keep huntin’, brother.

Joe Ciccone lives in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He wrote me that he’s recently finished restoring a 1961 Willys Wagon. Nice! His 2000 poetry RaiBook, *North of Jersey*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/northofjersey.html>.

ElectroLounge Forums is a discussion community for contributors to *The Cenacle*, found at <http://electrolounge.boards.net/>. Writers, artists, photographers, & readers are encouraged to request a membership (no charge) & visit these forums to meet those whose works fill the pages of *The Cenacle*.

John Echem lives in Nigeria & teaches English at local schools. His poetic collaboration with Tamara Miles in this issue marks his first contribution to *The Cenacle*. Welcome, John!

Leia Friedman is a writer, clinician, & professor living in Sherman, Connecticut. Her writing last appeared in *Cenacle* | 107 | April 2019. I really appreciated receiving her feedback on the last issue. Thanks, Leia!

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. Her great facility on the small playground of haiku amazes me every time. Her 2004 poetry RaiBook, *Spirit World Restless*, can be found at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/raibooks/spiritworldrestless.html>.

Jimmy Heffernan lives in Salt Lake City, Utah. His poetry in this issue is again from his new book, *Many Worlds: A Collection of Poems*, published by Modern Memoirs in March 2019. A treat of a book!

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Kansas City, Kansas. Chapters from his epic work-in-progress, *Nighttime Daydreams*, appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. His most recent book is *Gateway Mexico (Nighttime Daydreams Book 1)*, published by Amazon in 2018. It can be found online at: <https://tinyurl.com/y2zzsdwa>. Right now he & kin are up in Maine, taking a breather from the jobhunting battle.

Colin James lives in western Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His favorite companion these days is his little grandson, who stares down Colin's endlessly odd patter. His most recent book of poetry, *Resisting Probability*, was published by Sagging Meniscus Press in 2017.

Gregory Kelly lives in England. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. He has been my work colleague for quite a few years, & collaborating with him is one of my favorite parts of the daily grind!

Sam Knot lives in rural France. He is a new contributor to *The Cenacle*. It was a nice surprise recently to get back in touch with Sam; we knew each other from online forums years ago. Welcome to *The Cenacle*!

Tamara Miles lives in Elgin, South Carolina. Her poetry & prose appear regularly in *The Cenacle*. She also hosts the excellent poetry show, "Where the Most Light Falls," on SpiritPlants Radio (spiritplantsradio.com). She surprised me with her collaborative poem with John Echem. What a treat!

Martina Newberry lives in Palm Springs, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. She makes this world a little lighter for her being in it. Her recent book of poetry, *Vaulted Skies*, was published by Prolific Press in June 2019. More of her writings can be found at: <https://martinnewberry.wordpress.com>.

Michael Pollan lives in San Francisco, California. He is a writer, activist, & professor. His 2018 book, *How to Change Your Mind*, has proven a crucial text in expanding the reach of the psychedelic renaissance. More of his writings can be found at: <https://michaelpollan.com/>.

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. His devotion to his writing & his loved ones is a way of life I deeply admire. His newest book of poetry is called *Jock Poems and Reflections for Proper Bostonians*, published by Pocol Press in March 2019.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. She is truly a magickal Creature of the White Woods.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. Finding new ways to walk the weird paths of life a little better.

Virginia Woolf was born in London, England, in 1882, & died in Lewes, England, in 1941. She is considered one of the 20th century's greatest writers. Scriptor Press published her piece in this issue as part of the 2003 Burning Man Books series. This volume can be found online at: <http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>.

* * * * *



